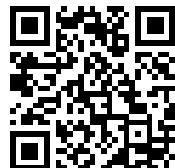


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# NIZRA

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ANDREW KLARMANN

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# NIZRA

THE FLOWER OF THE PARSA

*THE VISIT OF THE WISEMEN*

BY

ANDREW KLARMANN

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS OF GAN-SAR"



ST. LOUIS, MO., AND FREIBURG (BADEN)

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## PREFACE

### *To the Kind Reader:*

It is not customary to write prefaces to novels; but the author of this book thinks he owes the reader an explanation, lest its numerous foot-notes be suspected of being added in order to lend the appearance of learnedness to the story. This suspicion, however, will be found in the reading to be false. Hence we may as well head it off, and give the reason for the suspicious adornment of the "heels" of the book: the sole purpose of the notes is, to substantiate such descriptions as would otherwise seem to the daily reader to be merely the unrestrained ebullitions of fancy, and the phantastic inventions of a religious enthusiast, when they are the reflections of historical fact as latterly disclosed by historians, philologists, and archæologists of the highest authority, notwithstanding the fact that these authors belong to all manner, or to none, of religious persuasion.

The picture of social and religious life here painted is not the familiar one of a life without light, without comfort, without aim, so fre-



quently presented in novels and plays dealing with the destinies of the ancient nations. And the reason is, that the author has no "axe to grind," and, therefore, writes down the life-story of his characters as he finds it between the pages of the ancient records. Nor has he any scruples about looking the Divine in the face when he meets with it.—Why should we go out of the way of the supernatural, when we can decline its contact only by hypocrisy or deception?

The agnostic, a self-confessed doubter, and the atheist, a self-confessed denier, of the supernatural, both prejudiced against the results of their labors from the outset, most scrupulously eschew the mention of God, even at the cost of their success and their reputation: they have an "axe to grind"; we have not. The evidences of a Divine Providence presiding over the destinies of man are so plainly written in the pages of history, that he who runs may read them, provided he wants to read.

It is, therefore, to show due regard to the truths of revelation, which are so lavishly displayed in the story of the ancient nations, but which many strenuously labor to hide under a bushel, that historical references are given in this novel.

The particular purpose of this book is, to

place the concise and scant reports of the holy writers of the Gospel side by side with contemporary events of profane history. Manners and customs, faiths and follies, the setting of incidents recorded by the writers of ancient history, were well known to the early readers of the holy Gospel, and hence, could be omitted by the Evangelists; but *we* can become familiar with them only by patient study of that all-important epoch. Therefore, this book, and others of the same kind, instead of detracting from the dignity of the gospel narrative, should assist the reader in grasping the reality of the wonderful dispositions of God in working our Redemption, and in placing the most eminent fact of history, the life of the God-Man, in line with other important facts of history, as the Key to all history.

Everything improbable or irreverent has been most scrupulously avoided. The texture of the story is historical throughout, and the course of the narrative has been so well kept within the limits of probability, that the various incidents and episodes could easily be duplicated with extracts from the lives of the early Martyrs and Confessors of the Church. This method of weaving an historical garb about scriptural events, in order to facilitate their understanding for those who have neither leisure nor

means to acquaint themselves with the literature of antiquity, is employed not only by modern commentators on the gospel, but also by eminent ascetical writers, as the perusal of such splendid works as those of PP. Müllendorff, Maas and Fonck, S.J., and others, will prove. We could hardly be said to do our duty, if we disdained to utilize the material gathered by our busy *savants* for the fostering of piety and knowledge, and consigned so rich a field of religious instruction to be exploited by the Modernists for the destruction of faith.

That, therefore, much good may result from the reading of this humble volume, is the pious hope of

THE AUTHOR.

*Woodhaven, N. Y., May 28th, 1908.*

*On the Feast of the Ascension.*

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# **Mizra**

## **The Flower of the Parsa**

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **THE WONDER OF THE NIGHT**

A young girl with her long, dark hair and her white garments fluttering and flying in the morning wind, was leaning over the balustrade which enclosed the tiled roof of her house, and intently watching the agitated groups in the streets below. "What may it portend!" she exclaimed, the pure translucent white of her face becoming suffused with a blush of joy so delicate, that it might have been mistaken for the rose-tinted breath of the dawn upon her cheek.

Her gaze again sought the fast blushing sky of the East, whither the eyes of the excited people in the streets of Rhaga<sup>1</sup> had been straining with alternate awe and delight. But the sun was now sending its gleaming shafts upwards into the blue dome of heaven with blind-

<sup>1</sup> The ancient capital, situated where later Teheran was built, the modern capital of Persia.

ing profusion; the "Wonder of the Night," which had drawn the breathless attention of the curious masses of Eran for all the hours since the nightfall of the previous day, had been engulfed in the radiant splendor of the morning.

"It is gone—watch, it may reappear!" the people whispered with many sighs and other expressions of regret and disappointment.

Nizra also turned away with the shadow of tender sadness on her brow, and moved towards a tent erected in the middle of the enclosed roof. "Father," she called with the sweet note of filial love and reverence in the word, "Father! May I enter?" And she raised the loose curtain which covered the entrance of Caspar's observatory, and entered without waiting for an answer.

But with a cry of wonder she remained motionless on the threshold, forgetting even to release the curtain from her hand. Her father was kneeling before her, his hands outstretched, his eyes raised to the eastern sky, his lips moving in prayer; he seemed to be unconscious of her presence.

After a moment of surprise, Nizra again called to him: "Father, it has vanished!"

Caspar arose, and meeting her halfway across the room, as she rushed towards him, caught her up in his arms, and pressed a kiss

upon her brow. "Nizra, my child," he exclaimed, still holding her to his breast, and exultingly smiling down into her upturned eyes, "the days of our delivery are at hand! It is *His* star, the star of the Peaceful and Mighty Ruler to come, the star, of which the prophet of Aram has spoken."<sup>1</sup>

"But it has paled away before the sun," Nizra ventured to object.

"It will appear again at eve; and if it appears during seven nights in succession, and after that remains standing still in the western horizon, it is the signal of the Star to rise out of Jacob, and I shall prepare to follow its beckoning, and bend my knee to the King of the Ages."

"Wilt allow me to journey with thee to the land of the Jews?"

"Thou art too frail, child, to travel these hard roads; it is a journey of eighty days, on the back of a dromedary, through arid deserts and across roaring waters; thou art too frail, my dear one, to follow the ways of eagerly hurrying pilgrims."

"But, father mine, I am not frailer than He, who, if thy legend fail thee not, is come from Heaven to become a child of man. If He be made my brother in the flesh, must I not bear

<sup>1</sup> Balaam; Num., xxiv., 17.



Him homage? A 'royal brother'—dost remember what that cunning prophetess foretold thee of my lot of life?—I must make haste to meet Him, and offer my respects."

Caspar was a little startled at the unusual persistence of his dutiful daughter. But he understood that the events of the preceding night had revived the hopes which she had borne in her innermost heart from her earliest childhood. Nizra was his only child; and Heaven had blest his hearth with her late in life, after many years of gloom. At her birth assisted one of those ancient dwellers of the solitude, a woman, who had worn away her life in the expectation of witnessing the hopes of her people realized,<sup>1</sup> and of hastening the accomplishment of the designs of Heaven by her prayers and penance. She had appeared unbidden in the house of Caspar, when his expectations of the most precious of domestic blessings were about to be fulfilled, and had pronounced this prophecy at Nizra's cradle: "The sister of the king thou shalt be, and the spouse of a mighty prince; the star of the East shall be thy sign, and the symbol of the fathers, thy reward."

Caspar was himself of princely rank. At

<sup>1</sup> Zoroaster, the Persian Reformer, had predicted the advent of the *Sosiosh* (Greek: Soter), the Savior, a thousand years before.

first, the mysterious prediction had caused him much unrest and care; was he himself to become king? But the seeress had not called Nizra "the *daughter* of a king," an appellation lying much nearer the boundaries of probability than the one bestowed, in the event of the father's acquiring royal honors and power. The "Star of the East" mystified him still more; Balaam, a prophet of God among the pagan nations of the "Land of the Two Rivers,"<sup>1</sup> had foretold the rise of a star over the "people of God," the Jews; but it was not clear, whether that Star was to be merely the *signal* of His advent, the "Hope of the nations," as Jacob had proclaimed Him in a vision of his death-bed, or also the symbol of the future great King.

Hence Caspar had consumed himself with anxiety over his child's mysterious future. If the prophetess had assumed Jerusalem as the center of the realm of the new king, then the star would appear west of Aram, the country of Balaam, and east of Jerusalem, and could consistently be called "the Star of the East"; but if the prophetess had intended to name the star from its position relative to Aram, then the prediction might involve a marriage with one of the princes of Elam, or of Assur,<sup>2</sup> who

<sup>1</sup> Mesopotamia (Padan-Aram of the ancients).

<sup>2</sup> Persia, Assyria and Babylonia.

were the most zealous worshipers of the starry firmament.

The most perplexing problem, however, was proposed in "the symbol of the fathers," which was to be Nizra's reward.

Naturally enough, Caspar had first thought of the heraldic symbol of his own house, the genealogy of which had been written for a thousand years past, and longer.

But the seeress had not said: "The symbol of *her* fathers." Therefore, the sage had searched among the temples and palaces of Nineveh and Babel, of Anu<sup>1</sup> and Memphis, among the ruins of Eran and Ind,<sup>2</sup> the length and breadth of the world, and discovered no symbol in common use among the people of antiquity, save the one which he himself bore in embroidery on his priestly robes, the single wedge of the Babylonians, the archaic and mystic sign for the name of their supreme God.<sup>3</sup>

In Egypt, the wedge was changed into what appeared originally to have been a sword or a knife with a crossed hilt, without the handle, T. Research in the books of the Hebrews had revealed it in the shape of the letter *Thau* (T),<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heliopolis, in Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> Northern Persia and India.

<sup>3</sup> Compare *Hom*, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> Ezech. ix. 4. "*Thau* was written in the time of Ezechiel and down to Esdras as we now write the Greek and the Latin T. . . . Among the Egyptians, however, it was the

which is the sign of God, the *Saving Sign*, in the book of one of their ancient prophets, Ezechiel.

The ancient Eranian temples bore profuse testimony to the universal use of the same symbol in all the actions of divine service, and as the official seal of kings, priests and princes. Among the multitude of signs, seals and symbols, the symbol of the Thau, in several variations, alone and always had thrust itself upon him as the *holy symbol*.

His fathers had inherited it in the form of the wedge or blade from their northern ancestors, and had preserved it as a token of their descent from the sons of Japhet,<sup>1</sup> and as a pledge of their unswerving fidelity to the traditions of the ancient fathers of the days of Noah, amid universal idolatry and ignorant superstitions. It must be the symbol, the credentials of the Prince and Divine Ambassador, the "reward" of Nizra.

But what was the significance of the mysterious *Thau*? In the days of the fathers after the covenant of Noah. Caspar knew, the sceptre

*characteristic sign* of the future life, as Coelius testifies. And among the Latins and the Greeks, the judge used to mark with *θ* (Thita) those who were to be condemned, and with T (Thau), those who were to be acquitted, etc." Tirinus, in Ezech.; Chap. 9, 4.

<sup>1</sup> Through Tubal, whose descendants preserved the ancient traditions the longest.

of the head or patriarch of a tribe was fashioned in the shape of that sign, and served both as the symbol of supreme authority and as the rod with which the ground was measured out and allotted as an inviolable portion to each family.

The "tree" which was erected in the desert by the leader of the Children of Israel to bear the symbol of delivery from the venomous serpents, was an imitation of that peculiar sceptre of the patriarchs of old. And in the mythological accounts which the sages of Babylon rendered of the ruin brought upon the originators of the race by the enmity of a "heavenly" malefactor, the "tree of the ruin" again was represented in the form of the *Thau*.

Moreover, it was the sign of "*the man in the midst of the avengers clothed with linen, who was bidden by the Lord of hosts to mark Thau upon the foreheads of the men that sigh in Jerusalem; and that sign saved them from the hands of the avengers of the Lord of hosts.*"<sup>1</sup>

But that Man was "the Angel of the Testament,"<sup>2</sup> who had also spoken to Abraham, and who had followed the Children of God in their weary wanderings through the wilderness:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ezech., i. c.

<sup>2</sup> Malachy, iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Confer: I. Cor. x. 3-4.

hence the "Sign of the Fathers" was, most probably, the Sign of the Ruler of Israel and of the Nations, who was to bring anew into the world the best Blessings of Heaven. It might signify the sceptre of His power, or the rod of His bounty, wherewith He would apportion His own heritage to the children of men. Suffice it, that Nizra was to be one of the appointed heirs!

These thoughts of mystery in the soul of the fond father had to-day opened with the brilliancy and perfume of the lilies of spring. The wonderful star, which had risen on the path of the sun at midnight, and had steadily moved westward beyond the horizon, only to reappear towards morning at the very portals of dawn, the glorious messenger of the sun, shedding its myriad silvery beams in all directions over the purple vault of heaven, seemingly pendent in midair, and as free in its course as an angel of the Most High; the admiration of sage and savage alike; a crown of luring flames; a visitor from Eternity plainly interested in the ways of the earth: was it not "*the Star of the East?*"

Caspar had taken Nizra out of her sleep in the night, and had placed her at his side in his station on the roof. It had not been necessary to point out to her the strange visitor in the

sky; for its quiet and beautiful radiance had already drawn the attention of thousands of curious spectators in the streets, whose wonderment did not confine itself to silent observation and delight. At sight of it, Nizra had knelt and raised her hands in a confused prayer full of terror and rejoicing.

As soon, therefore, as her father voiced his resolve to pay a visit of homage to the new-born King, whose symbol that star must be, she reminded him of her own privilege to pay her respects to her "royal brother" of the prophecy of her birth. She was ignorant of nothing that Caspar himself had learned concerning the meaning of the ancient traditions of the northern and eastern nations.

"Thou shalt be my companion," Caspar at last assented, after he had once more hurriedly, and in a flash, as it were, reviewed the sacred hopes of his own life in their gradual unfolding. Nizra joyfully threw her arms about him, and thanked him for the exceptional favor; for it was not at all the habit of people of estate to travel with women in their company.

As she descended the stairs, she met a messenger of the king,<sup>1</sup> who was come to summon

<sup>1</sup> A sub-king, or tribal king; scions of the ancient royal families were retained by the Parthian Great-kings, or Emperors. The Persian historians Hamzah and Mujmil record the Birth of Christ as the most important event of the reign of

Caspar, as many others of the Magi had already been summoned, to the palace. Nizra stopped him, and extracted the news from him, saying that she would bear it to her father. Then she made curious inquiry after the opinion of the strange event entertained at the court. "Do the king and his wise courtiers believe in the sign from Heaven?" she asked blandly. "I do not know, noble maid," he replied; "the king is disturbed over this strange apparition, fearing that it may forebode evil for the realm. The courtiers are divided in their interpretation." "That is not strange," Nizra laughed; "courtiers are too wary to adjust their coat before they feel whence the wind blows." Then she dismissed the messenger with a smile and a bow, and returned to her father.

"The king has gathered his wise men," she cried into the tent with a voice full of elation and spirit. One would have wondered to witness the change in her manner after the lightness of tone which she had assumed in her short interview with the page from the royal court. "Thou art also bidden to present thyself at the council, father," she continued; "how I do rejoice to know that the heavenly visitor has knocked even at the palace gate!"

Shapur, the Parthian Emperor. Masudi places it in the forty-first year of his reign.



Caspar's very heart appeared to melt for the pleasure of the vision before him: Nizra stood in the opening, her eyes expectantly fixed on his lips to read his reply, her luxuriant hair blown about her head in tumbling curls and streams, her fair brow gleaming with the innocence and piety of her untarnished soul, her cheeks slightly blushed, one hand holding the end of the curtain at the entrance, and the other raised over her head to lend emphasis to the expectancy of her face, her light and supple figure poised on the tips of her slippers, and her resplendent white robes thrown loosely into graceful folds about her form.

"King and prince and peasant," said Caspar earnestly, with his heart in his mouth, "must bow with equal lowliness to Heaven. What is a crown of gold in the sight of Him, who daily gilds anew the firmament immense, and crowns with wreaths of living verdure the wide expanse of smiling field and meadow and towering mountain range! A sceptre, what, to match the fiery rod that flashes through the storm-cloud, and makes the heart of kings quake with terror! A realm of hundred cities—what a toy to compare with the myriad wandering worlds above thy head! A word of power!—It is *His* voice that rends the world in twain!—This is, my

child, the newborn son of Heaven, who has doffed His crown and cast it on the sky!"

Nizra had observed her father with growing wonder, although the view he opened before her of the supremacy of the Almighty King of Eternity was not quite new to her. But when his fervor swerved towards the cradle of the Ruler promised to the Jews, whom she had indeed held to be sent of God, but not the Son of God in substance, the slight color of her face began to vanish, and left her pale with fear. Was she to become sister to Him? Impossible of conception!—But instantly, at the revision of the stupendous thought, her heart seemed to her to grow larger and warmer, and to transfuse its blissful glow into every vein of her body. "Father mine," she exclaimed, as if she had that moment come out of an ecstasy, "how may a God lift up a clod of clay unto Himself!" She faltered at the dreadful sublimity of the thought, that ravished her power of sense and speech.

But Caspar, whose maturity of years and consideration had strengthened the sense of the supernatural within him, silently took one of her hands and laid it upon his heart. After a little while, as Nizra looked up at him questioningly, "Seventy years," he said, "this pulse

hath not ceased to beat; some day it will cease; hast ever seen a corpse?" Nizra shook her head. "It hath a heart," he continued, "which beateth not. It hath eyes, not blind, but dead; ears, not stopped, but dead: but it hath not soul and life. If life can fashion clay into a man, why can Omnipotence not stoop to make a God of man? And in His human garb He can thy brother be!"

But Nizra could not comprehend it. She shook her head doubtfully, and cast down her eyes, the trouble of her mind drawing a veil of shadow over her brow. "Go to the council, father," she replied diffidently, "and hear the verdict of the learned priests! It is too great, too sweet, too tempting, to be true!"

## CHAPTER II

### THE COUNCIL OF THE WISE

The large marble hall of the royal council-chamber with its colossal columns and arches, and its lavish decorations of red stone flowers imbedded in the snowy white of the walls, barely bore a semblance of its customary soberness and awe. The king indeed was already seated upon the throne canopied with gold-cloth and hung with purple tapestry; his courtiers, guards and pages encircled him with a triple round of blazing colors and warm reverence; the majesty of Mensor had not waned and faded; his powerful figure, garbed in the magnificent robes of Oriental royalty, and adorned with the quiet insignia of venerable old age, inspired the select assembly as much as of yore with sentiments of loyalty and respect: but the expectant silence of the court was not in evidence; there was something besides the personality of the king this day to preoccupy the minds and hearts of Mensor's noble sages.

A crier stepped forward and addressed the councilmen in the name of the king:

“Ye need not hear again what a thousand voices have to-day proclaimed. But what wisdom ye may have garnered from the dread event, it is our Lord, the king’s, pleasure to receive. Doth it forebode a scourge, to chastise the nations, or doth it hail the glory of a future nobler king? Ye are bid to speak your mind without reserve; our Lord, the king, doth will you to be free. He hath himself asked Heaven to gather him to his fathers, if it please the Powers above to give a wiser prince to ascend his throne.”

After a few moments of intense silence, Balthassar arose, the senior of the priests of Assur, a stranger among the Parsa, but admitted to the circle of the wise men for his godly wisdom. Moving slowly towards the place where the throne was erected, he raised his eyes to the king, and said in a loud, clear, sober voice:

“My Lord, that Wonder of the Night is the harbinger of the renewal of the earth. Would Heaven send us warning of a plague, of war, of distress of any sort: a rod, I think, would fitter monitor be, than a smiling, luring wreath of light. It is an angel, Lord, to bring us love and peace, the Angel of the Covenant of Eden. If it descend, it shall small wonder be, if, robed in light and radiance, we behold the Child of God, the Virgin’s Son; for thus the

Jews have holy legend kept: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called *WITH US IS GOD*.'

"The exiled He shall gather in the earth, and lead them home, not strangers more, but children of His Father, and His own brethren. Would I could live to see His glorious reign!"

Then Balthassar bowed low before the king, and returned with downcast eyes to his seat among the priests.

Another arose, young, severe, and stern of mien. He prostrated himself before the throne. "If it please my Lord to hear another tale," he said with cold, incisive accents, after he had been bidden to arise, "I have no doubt but that the hopes of the old are strained beyond the sufferance of sense. Strange signs, constellations, comets and shooting stars have often been observed to disturb the placid skies; but is it not preposterous for us to claim sure knowledge of *all* the disturbances of the heavens? Must this star bear a message from the bounds of eternity, simply because we have never before seen its peer, nor heard aught of a similar occurrence or phenomenon? Our charts of the firmament are but sparsely written; and heaven is so large, and its mysteries are so deep and tempting, that a fancy, lured by pretty phantoms, may people it with gods,

and sons of gods, and ghastly monsters, to diversify the delusion and to divert a weakly mind . . .”

The frowning countenance of the king silenced the scoffer before he finished, and he sat down, covered with confusion.

But the two speakers seemed to have exhausted the wisdom of the rest; no one stirred, until the crier, at a sign from the king, called the name of Caspar. “At the special behest of the king,” he cried, “Caspar, the sage and priest, shall reveal his views.”

Caspar was a favorite at the court of Mentor; the youngest of the king’s sons, Marut, a prince of noble parts in body and mind, had set his heart upon the beauty of Nizra, and his father had congratulated him on his prudent choice.

Caspar, therefore, approached the king with more confidence than his predecessors, and from the beginning raised his voice with the enthusiasm that swelled his heart.

“My Lord,” he began, “it seems to me that Balthassar overstrained his bow, and missed the mark above as far as his adversary missed it beneath the center. Let no man read the writing of God’s finger ere he has cleared his vision by research; for the Legend of the King to come has passed through too many mouths,

to have preserved its pristine clearness. The people of the North and of the South have added or detracted as seemed to suit their purpose, or as fitted the scant measure of their wisdom. Tongues have changed, and with the coining of new words, or the recoinage of the old, the ancient impress of the Messenger of Peace has been dulled, disfigured, and distorted. Greece, beauty-loving Greece, has wiped away its halo, and broken it in pieces, to bestow a bit of power on her Zeus, a bit of beauty on Apollo, a bit of virtue on Minerva; almighty Rome has shattered the image, and with its pieces, decked a thousand gods.

“The land of the Nile has strung it as an amulet around the neck of her holy bull; the Brahmans have usurped it as their own, and have made themselves the peers of Heaven’s Herald; the men of Sin and Ind,<sup>1</sup> lastly, have put it as a mark of the Divine over the face of Buddha: One nation has preserved it pure and fair, the Jews of Palestine. If, then, this star is His messenger, He must be sought among the Jews. A prophet of our own people has foretold it, when on his lips the malediction died, and left them free to speak the blessing of God: ‘I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not near: *A Star shall rise out*

<sup>1</sup> China—Sin—Moon, and India.



of *Jacob*, and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel.' <sup>1</sup>

"I have spent my life in the search for His signal: I have found the holy *Thau* among all the nations of the East, the North and the South; but the Jews alone have made it the signal of the Heavenly King."<sup>2</sup>

"Therefore, my Lord, it seems but meet to me, that both Balaam's Star, and the ancient sign of the patriarchal priests and chiefs, point towards Him, whom we have sought in darkness, and who now has set His sign among the stars. I shall make haste to do His gentle bidding!"

"Thou wilt undertake the hazardous journey to the land of the Jews?" the king exclaimed, rising from his throne; "and if thou search in vain—wilt thou return and own to us thy error?"

"I shall seek—and find Him!" Caspar replied with utmost security and fervor; "my search after His tracks in the ages of the past has not been in vain. And if I discovered His foot-prints in the temples of the world, and His

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxiv. 17. It may not be amiss to recall the fact, that the Israelites sojourned in Persia and Media during the second captivity, and came in daily contact with the highly cultured and deeply religious inhabitants of "Eran," the followers of Zarathustra or Zoroaster, the cleanest sage of pagan antiquity.

<sup>2</sup> The *Serpent* in the desert, and the *Marking* of Ezech. ix. 4, quoted above.

hand in the books of the nations, dost think I shall not recognize His face, when these my arms shall embrace Him?"

"Thou art beside thyself, Caspar, with thy life-long dream of Paradise on earth. Bethink thee of thy frailty, of the necessity of Nizra, and leave the hopes of Jewry to the Jews!"

"The burden of my years has been lightened with my joy; and Nizra shall not want nor mourn."

Then the king beckoned to Caspar with his eyes to draw nearer to the throne, and asked him quietly:

"Shall Marut take her home into my palace?"

"Nay, nay, my Lord," Caspar replied quickly; "she shall risk the hazards of my search with me!"

The king, in no gracious mood, immediately left the hall with his attendants. It was worth a kingdom in the land of the Parsa, to marry the daughter of so celebrated a sage as was Caspar, and the king would fain be certain of the election of his favorite youngest son to the throne after his own death. The obstinacy of Caspar against the union had offended him the more, because the sage had never deigned to reveal the reasons for his objection, except by a casual and irrelevant remark about his sol-

itude, if his dear one should be taken away from his hearth.

After the king had departed, the councilors formed groups and factions, and subjected the views aired by the three spokesmen to a close scrutiny. Balthassar was pronounced a visionary by some, a saint by others. Caspar's boldness was branded as the conceit of a philosopher, or lauded as the conviction of a diligent and unbiased searcher into the darkest depths of antiquity. The sage who had spoken in the second place, found neither many partisans nor many opponents: his irreverent audacity was charitably ignored. But as the final result of the lengthy and heated discussions, Caspar had brought over to his view so large a number, that when he left the council chamber, many a hearty "God-speed" followed him. "The truth shall make you free!" he cried out over the city, as he stood at the head of the lofty marble steps of the king's palace.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DARING OF YOUTH

That peculiar star, the appearance of which had suddenly disturbed the quiet and complacency of the inhabitants of ancient Rhaga, reappeared on seven successive nights, and after the sun had risen on the seventh day, maintained its position in the western horizon without paling before the splendor of the day. Its silvery shafts and darts, alive, it seemed, and waving a greeting to the stupefied witnesses on earth, did not mingle with the rays of the sun, even when the sun stood directly over it, and poured its light down in fiery sheaves at midday. It seemed not to own fellowship with the other wanderers of the trackless, boundless heavens.

Many of the sages had during that week made their home with Caspar; but Balthassar alone had resolved to brave the long and tedious journey into the land of the Jews in his company. King Mensor had again and again consulted also the other wise men, who had in a

few days flocked into the capital from all the corners of his realm. The opinions cleared considerably at the recurrence of the wonderful phenomenon; but when at last the star remained stationary, and would no longer yield its light and place even to the sun, all were agreed that it was the miraculous creation of Heaven, set in the sky as the messenger or the witness of some event that marked a turning point in the destiny of the world.

Caspar and Balthassar were ready to depart with their retinue of attendants on the evening of the seventh day, when Mensor, who had been advised of their unalterable resolve, recalled them for a private conference.

In the absence of her father, Nizra went down into her large gardens to pay a farewell visit, she said, to her pets, the flowers, which she had planted and nursed with her own hands, and to the song-birds which were accustomed to sing their morning anthem or their evening lay to her in ambitious rivalry for her applause.

It was evening now. The shadows of the sky cast a bluish, silver-tinted shimmer over the trembling foliage and the nodding buds and blossoms, and banished the darkness and death of the moonless night from the hedges and alleys of the garden.

Nizra moved along from bed to bed, whisper-

ing words of tenderness to her nurslings, and gathering the most humble, sweet-scented blossoms in her veil. "If ye were only hardy enough," she whispered to them, "to bear the heat of the day, as I shall bear it, that I might lay you down as an offering at the feet of the newborn King! But"—after a moment of regret—"the land of the Jews, surely, also bears flowers as beautiful and fragrant as the blossoms of Rhaga!"

Her soliloquy was interrupted by a voice from a dark clump of green:

"But sweet as *thou*, no field under heaven bears a flower!"

Nizra started, and was about to turn to flight, when Marut stepped out before her on the path from a bower of vines, and extended both his hands for a greeting; it was he, who had set her sweetness above that of all the flowers.

Had his father arranged the visit of Caspar at the court with this design?

Nizra stood surprised and confused. How great must be the devotion of the king's son, when he sets aside all form and custom in his suit! It had never been heard that a maiden was sought by her lover outside her home, and deprived of the protection of her mother, or of the companionship of her attendant maids. If

there was anyone to spy upon his plan, it would be the ruin of both!

The blush of confusion which had mounted the cheeks of the maid at the unexpected meeting, fast vanished in the succeeding pallor of her dread. She was scarcely capable of speech; but Marut had planted himself in the path with the visible determination to force from her lips at least an assurance of his hopes, if not an acceptance of his love. He had often before made open protestations of his tender regard for her; he had made her gifts of precious trinkets, such as woman esteems both as a tribute to her beauty and as an assurance of her value in the eyes of the giver. He had on occasions of public feasts laid a wreath of flowers from the palace gardens on her head with his own hands, and had given her confidential directions as to the most effective arrangement of her hair and veil. He had been about her as busily and insistently as the honey bee about the cups of the lily; and all the city had rejoiced at the common graces of the pair.

But Nizra had opposed to all his gentle importunity a reserve so uncompromising, and had maintained a silence so severe, that Marut had often attempted to forsake his "cold idol" for a more receptive choice. Had she but shown resistance to his suit! But she had ever

received and dismissed him with the same winsome smile.

No word of encouragement from her lips, no touch of tenderness from her hand; but that mysterious light of innocence and ingenuousness in her eyes, which blinded him, ravished him, vanquished him in every attempt to dethrone her, and to raise up a new idol in her place. At times, when he succeeded in obtaining the jealously coveted place at her side, and furtively fondled her silken hair, he felt, instead of the anticipated ecstasy of bliss, the cool sense of sacred reverence possess his disenchanted heart. She seemed then to him not to be made of flesh and blood, not to belong to the mortal ranks of her sex, but to be a lost member of a nobler tribe. But the very mystery of her undiscovered depth of sentiment, the fire of which was reflected in the irresistible witchery of her gaze, stirred the ardor and enhanced the bravery of his hopeless suit.

For this occasion he had patiently waited; his father would detain Caspar long enough to enable the heir of his throne to storm the inaccessible stronghold of Nizra's timidity with success.

When she, therefore, did not acknowledge his sweet compliment with as little even as her accustomed smile of pleasure, he summoned cour-



age, and grasped her hands. She allowed her store of blossoms to drop to the ground, but to his utter surprise, made no remonstrance against his boldness. He drew her into the shade of the trees, and she followed without resistance, leaving her hands locked in his without a tremor. His hair began to creep, and he himself felt the tremor of fear unnerving his hands. It was his usual experience of the sense of a strange reverence besetting and paralyzing his faculties in her immediate presence. But this time he rebelled against what he conceived to be his own diffidence, and made a strong effort to rid himself of the feeling of dread and terror.

“Nizra, my love,” he said softly, testing his own courage, “wilt thou depart into a land whence thou mayest not return? Wilt not at least pledge thee to be my bride, before thou leavest me, that I may claim thee, and seek thee, if thou be lost abroad? Speak, Nizra! Wilt not be mine? Why wouldst run after the destitute princelings of the Jews? They are the servants of Rome, and the throne of their king is disgraced by a tyrant<sup>1</sup> of the making of the Romans; by a monster of cruelty, whose hands are steeped in the blood of his own children. If an heir be born to *him*, he will not

<sup>1</sup> Herod the Great.

live until thou settest foot upon the boundaries of his kingdom. Remain with me, Nizra; our people will rejoice to make of thee their beloved queen!"

Nizra raised her large, limpid eyes, and replied sadly: "Marut, thou hast usurped a privilege which is a brother's, not a suitor's. Leave me!" Then she withdrew her hands and buried them in the folds of her mantle, and turned to move away.

But Marut, quivering with rage at the just and sharp rebuke, stepped in her way and stopped her, reaching with both his arms after her head. Nizra, however, passively declined her captor's effort, throwing back her head, and stepped back a few paces, without again looking at him. He was disconcerted. But it would not be prudent to carry his importunity too far; she might cry out in protest, and attract the attention of a watchful servant, or a chance passer-by beyond the wall, and thus destroy him and his prospects forever.

"Fear not," he parleyed; "the king himself has bid me dissuade thee from the mad undertaking, and win an answer to my suit."

He waited a long time for a reply. At length Nizra raised her head, and answered quietly: "It is not in the power of the king to set aside the rights and privileges of domestic security;

my garden is my house as much as yonder pile of stone. Thou hast made thyself guilty of an unpardonable trespass. I shall accompany my father at all hazards to pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews."

"Then I will ask leave of the king to follow thee and to keep watch over thee!"

"Thou must ask leave also of my father; and I feel safer, Marut, let me assure thee, without thy guardianship over me."

"But may I not associate myself to the company of Balthassar? Wouldst bear it ill, to see me pine for thee? Travel with thee, I must, would I not despair at home without thy blissful presence; and I *will*."

"I would not keep thee from laying thy greetings at the feet of the new Ruler; he may enlighten thee on the dignity of royal power, and on the narrowness of royal privilege."

" 'Tis lowly lesson that a child may teach!"

"But if that Child be God!"

"The ancient superstition of the feeble!"

"I beg thee, Marut, now that thou hast plainly professed thy unbelief, to come and learn the humbleness of heart, that is the offense of all the self-sufficient wise. With fire and sword have kings labored to establish order in the earth; with blood and incense have the priests appealed to an obdurate Heaven; with

scroll and scripture have the sages sought to conjure the ills of our restless race: but meekness and humbleness shall be *His* sceptre, and love shall be the ensign of His reign. It is the spirit of man, not the order of the world, that needs must be made new. And thou thyself hast need of gentler teaching!"

"A prophetess," unwary Marut exclaimed, fascinated by the silvery tinkle of her words, "the worthy daughter of a noble sage!" He was so enthralled with her elfish appearance that the import of her speech had not entered beyond his hearing.

But he had by his unguarded exclamation conjured up the dreaded danger of detection. Once more he groped for her hands; but she fled from him. He slunk into a thicket with a mumbled execration. He heard the heavy tread of a man, probably a servant of Caspar's house, on the garden path.

But the danger passed without exposing his misconduct. Nizra called the name of the servant from the opposite side of the garden, and the man, looking over, was surprised to see her alone, and quietly plucking roses and filling her veil with them. He approached her curiously, but respectfully, and made a thousand excuses for having intruded upon her retreat. "I thought I heard a cry in the garden,"

he said, "and I am come to be at thy side, if aught of evil threaten thee. But the air is filled with mystery these nights," he exclaimed with an awed look at the 'Wonder of the Night' in the western horizon, "and my senses are disturbed. Forgive me, noble mistress!" And thus he relieved Nizra of the obligation of revealing Marut's indiscretion to her father.

That same night they mounted, and departed on their journey to the land of the Jews. The wonderful Star seemed to descend more and more, until it flamed out before them above their course like a beckoning torch borne in the hand of a cheerful herald. But Marut did not join himself to the brilliant and happy caravan.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ROAD OF THE PILGRIMS

Balthassar was not an Eranian, or Parsa, by birth, but a prince of Assyria; hence a descendant of Assur, the third son of Sem, and of Semitic extraction. The Persians, the Medes, the Bactrians, and all the other inhabitants of the Eranian Highlands, on the contrary, were descended from the great Aryan family, whose original progenitor was Japhet, the third son of Noah. The ancient traditions of the fall of the angels, of the seduction of Eden, of the Flood, and the prophecy of a Restorer of the race, confused, distorted and mutilated among the Chaldeans and the Aramites, remained almost intact in the keep of the Eranians for at least a thousand years after Noah, while the Hindus, the other great branch of the Japhetites, suffered themselves to be imposed upon by the sinister and fatuous speculations of their sages, who had begun early to aspire to the possession of wisdom far above the simple and pure faith of the fathers, and to claim for themselves an insight into the mysteries of the

nether world, far keener than that bestowed by the God of Heaven upon the ancient Prenoa-chian patriarchs. "Your eyes shall be opened," was their slogan, "and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."<sup>1</sup> Their teaching soon brought forth fruit according to its kind; the religion of the nations thus misled, degenerated into a most hideous and degrading superstition.

The Eranians, on the other hand, although later also mingling superstitious and phantastic beliefs with the ancient faith, had never descended to the religious orgies of their Eastern brethren, and after the lapse of a thousand years, accepted the reformation of their religious rites and tenets from that brilliant and reverent philosopher, Zarathustra.<sup>2</sup> Thus they preserved at least the hope of a future redemption. Later, their contact with the Israelites had revived their fervor; and when Thomas, the Apostle, was sent among them to preach the accomplishment of their longings and yearnings for peace and reconciliation with Heaven, they received him with open arms, and turned his instructions to their salvation. The task of Thomas was the most gratifying and the most profitable of those assigned to the Messengers of the *Light of the World*.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> "The Brilliant Star."

Balthassar was one of the few Assyrian wise men to whom the grotesque mythology of their people held out neither peace nor hope of peace. He, therefore, assiduously applied himself to the study of the religious books of the neighboring Parsa,<sup>1</sup> or Persians, with the result, that he was captivated by the loftiness of their aspirations. The patriarchal spirit, perpetuated in the monasticism of their hierarchy, the purity of their domestic relations, their reverence for womanhood, resulting from their belief that a maiden shall conquer the serpent-seducer of their traditions, and usher in the reign of the Mighty King, and many more usages and observances, were so congenial to his own conceptions of the much-needed restoration of mankind to happiness and truth, that he decided to make his lasting abode with these artless people. The god Hoa,<sup>2</sup> whom the Assyrians had accepted from Babylon, together with his symbol, the *serpent*, had become to him the seducer instead of the savior, and he gladly discarded him and all his posterity, attendants and transfigurations, with Anatu, the god-mother, with Baltis, the lewd, and Davkina, the merciful. But he did not bow to the pop-

<sup>1</sup> The plural should be Parsi, but in order to avoid mistaking them for the modern Parsee or Parsi, we have decided to retain the ancient form of the singular.

<sup>2</sup> "The Bright One," The Moon (Sem).



ular idol of the Eranians, Apam-napat, the god of the waters, and to their god of fire, Agni;<sup>1</sup> once delivered from the imposition of idolatry, he freely delved into the religious lore of the Parsa, accessible only to the learned and wise.

On his wanderings between the royal libraries and the temples, he had met Caspar who, bent on the same quest, had hailed him as a brother in the search after Truth, and thenceforward they had pursued their object in common. And when they had gathered abundant proof that the trust of their hearts in a nobler Providence than was adored by the idolaters, was founded, not only on their own individual aspirations, nor yet only on the faint universal glimmer of popular hopes, but also on documentary evidence, dust-stained, forgotten, or transmitted in interpolated and mutilated copy from century to century, they felt a satisfaction so quickening that they treasured it up in their hearts as the sweet breath of the approaching Redemption.

Nizra, however, had by dint of begging, asking, importuning and weeping succeeded in wresting the holy secret from the sages. It had not made her sneer at the inconceivable sublimity of the prospect of a divine incarnation, as

<sup>1</sup> The theological personification of fire among the Eranians (Parsee).

they had feared; it had not provoked her to childish ridicule of the incessantly recurring delusion of a divine child, that had ever stood before the eyes of their fathers as a taunting mockery, ever beckoning from unscalable heights and ever vanishing beyond the reach of sober vision. Neither was their apprehension realized that the revealing of so noble a secret, as the alluring hope of all the women of antiquity to become the mother of the Son of God, would turn her head. Nizra was endowed with the chaste beauty of the flowers, with the perfect form of the traditional cherubs,<sup>1</sup> with the calmness and serenity of a sylvan lake, and with an exceedingly bright intelligence: hence the fear, that a maiden, so lavishly gifted, might harbor conceit enough to pose as the Chosen One among the many, was at least not vain at first sight. But the daughter of Caspar had enjoyed the precious blessing of an early training by a wise father in the habits of obedience and docility, which infallibly breed the spirit of humility and soberness; there was no danger that she would lose her head over an illusion of pride. She entered upon the journey to the cradle of the new King with a heart as much afire with enthusiasm over the dawning day of Redemption,

<sup>1</sup> Cherub seems to be also a Babylonian word, and signifies an "Attendant at the throne (of God?)."

as her father's and that of their common friend and counselor Balthassar, the Chaldean.

Caspar had not overdrawn his picture, when he had described the journey as long and hard, and had warned Nizra of her frailty. They might, indeed, have taken voyage on the Karun, the only navigable river of their country, and have sailed down to its confluence with the great Euphrates, thus avoiding the crossing of snow-capped, inhospitable crests, of half-frozen streams, and dangerous pools and ponds, half covered with ice, and half glistening with a treacherous crust of salt, and of bleak deserts of sand, strewn with stone of all sizes and shapes, seemingly only for the utter confusion and harassing of the traveler. But the Star led on westward. This course would shorten their way by several weeks, but would also exact of them, in anticipation, the tribute of their good will to the Infant Heavenly King.—

After many, many days of fatigue, they arrived at the outskirts of the desert of Syria, opposite Tadmor,<sup>1</sup> in the land of Aram—and the Star disappeared from their view. In the last few weeks it had ascended, moving towards them, or, rather, perhaps, allowing them to overtake it, and had diminished in size and splendor, rising steadily in the immense azure vault, until

<sup>1</sup> Palmyra.

at last, just when they reached the ancient borders of the Solomonic Kingdom, it vanished out of sight.

Their dismay knew no bounds. Nizra had bravely borne the hardships of the long journey, and had never winced at new dangers and difficulties, and never whimpered with the affectation of delicacy or terror; but even Nizra lost heart. Seven more days, even the seven days which they had idled away with doubting and tarrying at home, would take them to the royal city of Sion: were they to miss Him now? Was the time of His gracious manifestation passed?

All the tedious way from the gate of her garden of roses across deserts and rivers, through ravines and across mountains and marshes, through the mild regions of the valleys and over the snow and ice crowned brows of the Highlands, Nizra had been borne up by the enthusiasm of her hope to see the Child of Mystery, and, perhaps, to be allowed to press Him to her bosom. And now—it was too cruel to contemplate!—she faced the disappointment of all the sweet hopes of her childhood, and of the blissful dread with which the prospect of seeing the *Son of God* had latterly filled her soul.

Caspar and Balthassar, and their servants who had gained not a little knowledge concerning the object of the journey from their con-

ferences in the nightly camps, were at first as much disconcerted as the more impressionable maiden; the glorious conduct of Heaven had hitherto been to them the assurance that their arduous undertaking would succeed. Now Heaven had withdrawn its hand, had recalled its herald, furled its ensign—and forsaken them!

But in a day's conference and in a night's appeal to Him, who had called and guided them so far, the men recovered their confidence, and decided to press on towards Jerusalem. There, in the capital, He must be found, or must at least have left a trace to lead to His abode; or, if He had disappeared with His messenger, the scribes would direct them from their holy books to His hiding place. Their reviving trust infused courage into the heart of the disconsolate Nizra, and after a rest of another day, they resumed their course.

There were only about four hundred leagues more stretched between the desert and Jerusalem. From Tadmor they would hasten on to Damascus, and from Damascus follow the Great Road through Syria, thence through Galilee and Judea to the Road of Jerusalem which joined their own at Jericho. If they were not held up by the Roman toll-gatherers, whose greed and inquisitiveness had made them the scourge of travelers throughout the Eastern Conquests of

the Roman arms, they would enter Jerusalem probably on the fifth or sixth day; only this short distance separated them from their glorious goal! This thought inspired the entire caravan with new cheerfulness, and breathed the halo of devout festiveness over their happy faces.

Their passing everywhere aroused the curiosity of the plain and sober inhabitants of the Syrian towns and hamlets, of the Galilean husbandmen and fishermen. The appearance of these princes from the East was attended with a pomp of raiment and decoration such as was unknown in those regions, which had been made the scene of incessant wars for two hundred years past, and had in consequence of the habitual alarm and excitement of its unhappy inhabitants, assumed the unconcern and listlessness of a solitude.

Everywhere they were obliged to repeat the story of their adventures, and were pressed for an account of their aim; everywhere they were received with staring, startled looks, and hesitatingly bidden a wondering farewell.

Nizra plainly showed the wear of the journey, and was more frequently made the object of pity than of admiration. But Nizra disarmed the impertinence of those, who would upbraid her father with cruelty, with a smile full of that

secret and unfathomable bliss, which had again taken complete possession of her soul; she disdained to stoop to a defense which might provoke the irreverence of the pagan, or the ridicule of the Jew.

But she was not a little taken aback at the lack of enthusiasm in the land of the Jews, the home of the newborn King. Why was not all Galilee and Judea in an uproar of rejoicing over the glad tidings of the National Deliverer's advent?

This new, cheerless experience was readily communicated to the other pilgrims. She, the sensitive maiden, had first noticed the absence of the joy with which her whole being was alive, and for which she had longed and looked the more eagerly at their entry into *His* domain. But before she thought of calling her father's attention to the new disappointment, he had already discovered its shadow in her face. It was almost unbearable to proceed along the much frequented Great Damascus Road, and to witness, instead of the expected joy and jubilation, nothing but the hurry of the merchants, the cool recollection of the pilgrims, and the imperious parading of the Roman soldiers. Such silence was ominous! Their own countrymen, far out in the land of the East, had been startled by the

appearance of His Star—and the land of the Jews was ignorant of His presence!

The further they advanced towards the South, the keener grew their disappointment. Nowhere a sign of the rejoicing with which the land should ring; nowhere even the friendly echo of the joy of Jerusalem!

At Jericho they halted for the last time. Five hours more—and then, perhaps, the final, fearful disenchantment!

Caspar made a tentative inquiry of the inn-keeper, in whose stables they put up their beasts. This man was not a Jew, and would, therefore, not pursue his questioning beyond the limits that Caspar would prescribe. *Quintus*, the people about the house called him; hence he was a Roman, and a pagan, who was wont to laugh at the Jewish hopes of delivery from bondage; a bondage which he considered to be the bondage of Rome alone.

After he had but half satisfied his curiosity by inspecting the trappings of the dromedaries and the garments of the pilgrims, *Quintus* quite affably turned to Caspar and pertly put the opportunity of a consultation before him by praising the sturdiness of the beasts and the splendor of their adornment with the mien of an expert. He had himself been in the far East, he



said, in the region of the Caspian Sea, and even in Sipara,<sup>1</sup> where he had been the guest of a pious sage, thus delicately suggesting his supposition, that Caspar hailed from one of these countries.

The hosteler, according to his own account, had served ten years in the celebrated "Twelfth Ancient Legion,"<sup>2</sup> as its *aquilifer*, or standard bearer, and had learned a little of the history, language and manners of all the stations where he had been quartered. In Syria, he had acquired a practical knowledge of the Syro-chaldaic, the language which had then become the principal vehicle of Hebrew lore among the sages of the whole East. Caspar had learned it during his search after the prophetic records of Jewish antiquity. Balthassar, the Chaldean, had found its study more of a pastime than a task, because it still bore the ancient stamp of his own tongue. Even Nizra had begun at home to acquaint herself with the idiom of the Blessed Land of Promise, and had so perfected her valued acquisition during the journey, that

<sup>1</sup> "Volkmar and Knabenbauer explain *Caspar* as pointing to the Caspian Sea, or to the Aryan family, the Japhetites; even if we adopt other explanations of the name according to which Caspar was king of Sipara (Kas-Sipar) or of a part of India, the national character of the saint does not change." (Maas, S. J., *Gosp. of St. Matth.*, p. 19.)

<sup>2</sup> *Legio XII Antiqua*, a little later called *L. Fulminata*.

she could converse with the Jews with a considerable show of grace and precision.

Quintus had at first addressed Caspar, who appeared to be the leader of the distinguished party, in Greek; but Caspar had replied in the language of Palestine, because, although he was master of Greek, he noticed at once from the clumsy treatment of the language of the poets and the philosophers at Quintus's hands, that his host was ill at ease over its niceties.

"Hast lately been up to Jerusalem?" he asked after Quintus had related some of the reminiscences of his excursions into Media, Persia and Parthia, and had come to a rather sudden halt at the mention of the Parthian war. Caspar well knew, that only about twenty years before, the Roman colors and captives had been redeemed by Roman diplomacy, and not by the glory of the Roman arms, after having been in the hands of the Parthians nearly thirty years, and he pardoned the pride of the Roman *aquifer* for burying in silence the disgrace of the disastrous battle of Parthæ.

Quintus could not but be grateful for the delicacy of the Eastern sage, who refrained from pushing him head over heels, as he said to himself, into a verbal repetition of the galling event, and he answered more cheerfully:

“Nay, sir; Jerusalem is a very hornets’ nest; the farther away, the safer thy pelt. Herod is March-mad; the gray old dandy! He is now seventy and three, and yet, he dyes his hair and beard black, and lays a plaster of honey and ass’s milk on his face every night, to scare old Chronos<sup>1</sup> away! He has killed a few wives and several sons, and several hundred of the stubborn elders, who do not approve of all his follies.—Wouldst thou go up?”

“The king would not molest visitors to his court?”

“I would not wish to warrant thee thy head!”

“But peaceful strangers—dost think, he may disregard the obligations of hospitality?”

“Well, Caspar, Herod has often disregarded graver obligations, if they stood in the way of his ambition.”

“How old is his youngest son?”

“About twenty-two years.”<sup>2</sup>

Caspar looked disappointed unto tears. Quintus noticed the change, and inquired curiously: “Hast also heard the rumor of a new-born king of the Jews? If it be more than a revival of the old scheme of the Zealots, who have employed all manner of ruse to cheer and to stir up the apathetic masses to their former

<sup>1</sup> The god of time (and old age).

<sup>2</sup> Archelaus and Herod Antipas were then about that age.

jealousy of their national independence, he is surely not the son of Herod; for Herod himself is neither Jew nor pagan; just an Arab, whom *we* have assisted into the coveted throne of David. The Jews are looking forward to a *national* king and leader."

"Are there rumors abroad of a *newborn* scion of the ancient royal tribe?"

"Aye, sir, rumors, and no more," Quintus laughed; "for rumors commend me to the fanciful stories of the Jewish books; they teem with rumors and oracles. If aught of them come true, I would rather be a Jew myself than an honest Roman veteran. Their king to come is pictured as another Hercules, a Mercury, a Jupiter, a whole Olympus full of good and great gods! But I will wager my hostel against a bag of salt, that there is little difference between a real god and our good Emperor Augustus.<sup>1</sup> Why, they are thinking in Rome of erecting a temple in his honor during his lifetime!"

"Then thou dost not credit the news of a royal infant at Herod's palace?"

"There is no news to this effect at all! Some shepherds in the pasture lands about the City have dreamt that the clouds were opened above them one night, some time ago, and a child dropped down in their midst. They claim

<sup>1</sup> An opinion more or less prevalent at that time.

to have concealed him in a stall the first night of his appearance; but now they say they have lost sight of him. It is one of their periodical 'visits from above,' undoubtedly invented by some designing patriot to add a little fuel to the dying embers of their faith and trust in their antiquated father-god."

Caspar had become interested once more. The scorn and blasphemy with which the Roman veteran interlarded his report, had to be attributed to his ignorance of the true expectations of the pious and God-fearing Jews; but the tale of a child dropping from heaven would be either too bold or too stupid to be foisted on the irritated people at this time, were there not reality and substance to lend it credibility. And the sudden disappearance of the child may have been caused by the fear of Herod's jealousy; the shepherds may have been asked not to betray his present abode, and to observe silence about the circumstances of his birth. In this manner the shreds of their first announcement have been awkwardly pieced together, and made to do service with the gossipers in place of the true account. At all events, the rising of the magic Star and the garbled report of the event which it heralded combined in the one great truth of their search: The new King is come! If the dread of Herod's cruelty was so

great, that even a Roman, one of the "Masters of the world," thought it prudent to caution his guests against entering the capital for a visit at the court, it was indeed not surprising that the Child should be withdrawn from the attention of the public, and that the public should guard the secret from the eyes of the tyrant.

"The Jews have deserved a kindlier dispensation," Caspar replied lightly, "than to be made the subjects of a Herod; if Rome were their master, they would bear the burden of their disgrace without complaint."

"The Jews will tolerate *no* master," Quintus rejoined, "an he were their God! They are not content to be free; they burn to rule the Gentiles, and to set their foot on the neck of all nations. But mark me: Cæsar has had them counted; ere long he will have them taxed; and in the end, he will have them packed, and shipped to Rome as Oriental curiosities, to wait upon the matrons of our Patricians. They are born to be servants, because they will not be governed!"

Quintus arose and left Caspar to his thoughts. In a few minutes Caspar had acquainted Balthassar and Nizra with the import of their host's disclosures.

Nizra smiled knowingly at the rehearsing of the stupid gossip of a "child dropping from the

clouds." "I have heard a different version," she confessed after an encouraging glance from her father; "the kitchen maids have whispered to me that the cloud is a mask, an insertion, fashioned on an ancient prophecy, that 'the clouds shall rain the Just One down';<sup>1</sup> the child was born amid the chanting of an angelic choir; but where, they know not. He is concealed, true, they say; but he shall appear again as their king and savior. It would amount to an act of treason, if we would ask for him at Herod's court. But the priests may know his mother's retreat."

"Nevertheless we must go up to Jerusalem," Balthassar said doubtfully; "I do not believe that Herod would vent his jealousy on a newborn child. He is old; he must know that before this child shall attain to the age of manhood, his scepter shall have been asked of him; Herod, I trow, may be a tyrant; but he is no fool."

"Has the king heard of the popular rumor?" Caspar asked, turning to Nizra.

"He has made inquiry of his courtiers, and they in turn have asked the servants of the palace, who stand closer to the people than the foreign lords. The maids of this house are well informed of these details, because the people anx-

<sup>1</sup> *Isaias*, xlv. 8.

iously observe every move at the court; they fear another outbreak of the king's madness. But Herod's servants were deceived, if their advisers knew at all that the rumors were founded on fact. They were told that a child was born of strangers who had come up to the city for the *census*, and that some credulous old woman first pitied the homeless babe, then coddled, and at last adored him, peopling his cheerless abode with the choirs of the heavenly host. They say that Herod laughed at the superstitious hopes of the Jews for deliverance.—A short time ago, the maids related to me, another flurry was caused by the exultation of an old man, Simeon, in the temple. He is said to have shown that child to the Levites about the altar of the Lord, and to have predicted the ruin of Israel. The Levites smiled at the childish and feeble-minded elder; and the priest who presided over the ceremony of the presentation sneered at the lowly offering for the redeeming of the 'Glory of Israel'; a title which Simeon had given the child; these strangers seem to be poor people."

"We have seen little of Him," Balthassar said, meditatively, "except stray and deflected rays of His glory; but if there were no sun behind the clouds, there would not be a source of even this dubious gleam. Jerusalem is not blind; she is enveloped in a cloud of dread and



wonder.—Have not also some of our own countrymen laughed at the Ensign of Heaven?—Have there been no signs in the firmament in these regions?” he inquired of Nizra.

“Only those which the shepherds witnessed in the night of His birth, and in which none believe,” she answered absent-mindedly.

“The choir of angels?” from Balthassar.

“No message?” Caspar interposed.

“Aye, a glorious message! ‘This night is born unto you a Savior, who is the Anointed, the Lord,’ the angels have announced.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Caspar and Balthassar with one accord, “He is come! The Savior, the Anointed! Such sweet words have not again been heard since the days of their great prophets!”

“They are truly anointed with the fragrance of Eden!” Nizra added fervently, and turned with sparkling eyes towards the door, where new pilgrims were entering.

The new arrivals were only several way-worn and tired men of dusky skin, with close-cropped hair and shaven faces, and garbed in the most costly and gaudy raiment. Their heads were covered with long and curiously stitched linen head-cloths, to protect both head and shoulders from the heat and the dust of the road; their arms were bare, but ornamented

with golden bracelets, both at the wrists and at the upper arms, and their powerful chests were encased in embroidered jackets. The lower bodies were robed in pleated skirts which fell down well over the knees, and the sinewy figures were covered with mantles of fine crimson wool, trimmed with golden braid, gores and buckles. Their dress was that worn by the princes of Egypt and Ethiopia.

As they entered, they bowed a silent salute to the guests, and immediately arranged with the inn-keeper for lodgings over night. Before they put themselves at ease on the couches opposite those occupied by Caspar and his company, several of the men cast a look of embarrassment at Nizra. A servant, as black as jet, and of colossal figure, carried in a hamper after them, which he set down without a word, and prepared the table.

Nizra had never been as far abroad as the hot regions of the upper Nile; she stood agog with wonder at the swarthy pilgrims. They were all young men, even the leader, whose office and dignity was not to be mistaken. Besides the glittering circlet of gold, the fine settings of which incessantly gleamed in ruby and hyacinthine fire through the delicate material of his veil-cloth as the light of the candelabrum flitted over his head, he wore earrings, and a

seal ring, as precious as his diadem, and an artistically linked and turned golden chain around his neck.

His companions were as tastily, if not as lavishly decked out; but the whole group was enveloped in a cloud of the most exquisite perfume,<sup>1</sup> which spread over the large hall and quickly attracted the interest and attention of all the lodgers.

When Nizra thus became aware of the unintentional fitness of her exclamation about the "anointing with the fragrance of Eden," which she had made at the moment of their entry, she understood the look of embarrassment directed at her, and blushed for mortification. Even as she was considering how best to make amends to the strangers for her seeming lack of refinement, the dusky leader again directed his attentive, scrutinizing gaze at her. This was not the look of an offended man; it was respectful, although curious; it was even reverential, nay, a look of veneration, tinged with a scarcely perceptible trace of sorrow and resentment.

Nizra's innocence had prompted her, as soon as she realized her position, to go over to the stranger, to make apology, and to explain the misunderstanding. Had the stranger mani-

<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians were excessively fond of ointments and oils.

fested offense or continued uneasiness, she would have acted upon her impulse without second thought. But his embarrassment had given place to an expression of interest which she did not feel at liberty to encourage.

Meanwhile a servant of the inn had set before the new guests an amphora of wine, and for each member of the party, a silver cup. The leader raised his bumper after the black giant had filled it, and with its foot touched his forehead, saying in a low, whispered tone to his companions: "Pledge the honor of the King!" Then he spilled a few drops from the brim of the cup, and drank. "The honor of the King and his Star!" the others responded with subdued voice.

Caspar and Balthassar had not observed them with as much attention as Nizra, who had overheard "the pledge of the King and his Star." She instantly sprang from her seat, nearly upsetting her father. She had laid her head on his shoulder, crossing her hands under her cheek, and had been watching the Ethiopians with apparent unconcern. But at the pledging of the leader her attention had become noticeable; such ceremonies at wine were not in vogue in her own country.<sup>1</sup> She had not

<sup>1</sup> But they were quite usual with the Romans, whose influence had long made itself felt in the countries along the Nile.

caught his words, but she had plainly understood the response.

Caspar was nettled at the blank display of her interest in the manner of the strangers, and was about to administer a rebuke, when Nizra laid her hand upon his lips, and said to him, quietly, but with trembling voice: "They also are in quest of the newborn King of the Jews!"

At the same time Quintus sidled up to the leader, and inquired with the affability of a general, whether the wine were to their taste. "Good, good, good, the wine of Hal!"<sup>1</sup> they answered together, and the Roman veteran acknowledged the compliment with a gracious bow. "Hast heard of the newborn King of the Jews?" the dusky son of Cush<sup>2</sup> asked abruptly.

"Hast thou, too?" Quintus showed honest surprise, and looked over at Caspar's group.

"We saw his Star nearly three moons ago standing for seven days at the gate of the morning; and on the seventh day it traversed the vault of heaven towards the South, towards the Great Sea.<sup>3</sup> We have searched for him throughout Arabia and Chaldea, and again

<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians used the threefold positive for the superlative; *Hal* is their ancient name for Palestine; the wines of that country were much appreciated in Egypt throughout antiquity. See *Heyes, Egypt and the Bible*.

<sup>2</sup> A son of Cham, the father of the Ethiopians and of the oldest inhabitants of Egypt (*Jewish Antiquities*, I, 6, 2).

<sup>3</sup> The Mediterranean Sea.

throughout Edom, and have been sent hither with the advice to look for the Star-king among the Jews. Ye are awaiting the advent of a deliverer?"

"My friend, thanks to the gods of Rome, I am not a Jew! Why do ye not go to Rome, to look for a newborn king? Cæsar is the master of the Jews!"

"This answer we have received a hundred times! We have found Arabs, Idumites, Elamites, plain Gentiles, Syrians, Romans, Greeks, Kelts, Teutons and Gauls, men from Scythia, Pontus, Thrace and Asia; but not one who would be a Jew!"

The stranger had spoken with considerable spirit, which Quintus thought it proper to resent; he replied, therefore, rather boisterously:

"Wouldst thou be a Jew? They are the down-trodden, exhausted, snarling and groveling serfs of Rome; dost know it? They have neither king nor prince of their own, and their priests have become political schemers; Galilee snubs Judea, and Galilee and Judea together snub Samaria and Idumea; and all this division in their own house on account of their childish dream of a revival of the ancient splendor of their kings! The Galilean is jealous of the announced preferment of the Judean, the Samaritan is godless, because they have excommuni-

cated him, and the Idumite is envious of the portion of Judea, from which he was excluded by a trick,<sup>1</sup> as low as that of a Moorish archer! And the Judean haughtily turns up his nose at all his brethren: Wouldst be a Jew? I hold it lightly that thou hast encountered all the races of the earth, and hast not met with a good man who would be a Jew; there is Jewry, but there are no more Jews; the land of the Jews belongs to Rome!"

The boisterous tone of Quintus's voice had attracted all the guests, and also the loiterers of the house, to the hall. They were a motley crowd gathered from the four corners of the earth: Veterans, like Quintus, soldiers on leave of absence, travelers, pilgrims, merchants; dancers, clowns, wrestlers and general good-for-nothings; even women were among the guests of the Roman tavern.

One of the men, evidently a soldier on a rampage, of huge proportions, with red hair and beard and fair face, blue-eyed, and fresh of complexion, clad in a loose lounging gown and a pair of heavy soldier's boots, on terms of intimacy with the hosteler, wormed his way through the idle throng to the side of Quintus.

"*Quinte frater*"<sup>2</sup> he said, laying his muscu-

<sup>1</sup> Jacob acquiring the birthright of Esau.

<sup>2</sup> "Brother Quintus."

lar naked arms about the waist of Quintus, and lifting him up like a toy, "let these hungry and tired men eat their bread and drink their cup in peace. They care not for thy squint at the Jews, nor for thy dread of Cæsar. It is the Jew's turn now; who knows when Rome will go to the mill. Come away!" And he pulled the struggling and protesting Quintus out of the applauding mass and carried him away on his arms.

The treasonable and irreverent language of the resolute peacemaker marked him in the eyes of the pilgrims from the East as a foreigner to both Jews and Romans, and in view of the conditions of government and of feeling in the land of the Jews, as they had been disclosed in the few days of their acquaintance, enhanced their respect for the doughty soldier; they would keep him in mind. A man so absolutely reckless of the omnipotence of Rome would surely not hesitate to speak his mind plainly on the rumors of the miraculous event, if he had knowledge of them.

The Ethiopians had not been much impressed with the tirade of Quintus against the Jews; they considered it insulting arrogance and as such dismissed it from their minds. But they paid the hosteler the sum agreed upon for quarters, and prepared to leave the inn. At



that juncture, the auburn-haired soldier reappeared, and offered his services in seeking new lodgings. "It is only a journey of thirty leagues to Jerusalem," the dark leader protested, "and we may as well seek shelter there for the night."

"But, my friend," the soldier warned him, "there may be three hundred robbers, ten to each league, on the way; this road is as unsafe at night as the mountains of the Hauran, or the wilderness of Petràa. If thou wouldst not profit by my knowledge, thou shalt profit by my goodness: I will call my two companions, and give thee safe conduct to the city of Herod."

With this generous offer he turned on his heels, and strode away, out into the court, whence they heard him call: "Funstan! Duncan! Along, along!" He was bent upon doing the strangers a service at all events.

As the Ethiopians were putting away the remnants of their refreshments, Caspar and Balthassar approached the leader, and bowing low, asked leave of him to join his company. "We are come from the East to offer our homage and our gifts to the newborn King of the Jews," they explained, observing him expectantly. "Praise to God on high!" exclaimed the dark prince, and embraced each in

turn; "I am Melchior,<sup>1</sup> a governor of the Candacè,<sup>2</sup> on like errand bent.—But my trust has dwindled like a cloudlet over the desert!"

The soldier returned with his two companions; he had laid aside his long, loose gown, which had seemed so incongruous a garment in connection with his soldier's boots, laced almost to the knee with pigskin thongs, and had donned his military dress and accoutrements: a bright, scaly breastplate, with shoulder pieces of steel, and a short skirt of leather tongues, a pair of loose leather breeches, belt and sword, buckler and helmet. "The lances are too long to stand up in this hole," he jested, when he noticed that his assumed wards stared at him, the question as to the completeness of his outfit being visible in their eyes; "we have left them outside at the heads of our chargers. *Ite, macti virtute.*"<sup>3</sup>

Caspar, although divining the soldier's integrity from his whole-hearted interest in their comfort and safety, still would not trust himself and retinue, and especially Nizra, to the protection of a soldier of Rome, who must be a doubly welcome object of attack to a strong

<sup>1</sup> "King of Light."

<sup>2</sup> Candacè: the appellation of the queens of Ethiopia, as Pharaoh was the generic name of the kings of Egypt.

<sup>3</sup> "Forward, march; and God speed!" it may now be interpreted.

band of outlawed Jewish brigands; hence he turned towards him, and asked him, whence he hailed. "Thou art thyself a stranger in these parts," he said earnestly, "and wilt not take it amiss, if I assure me of the safety of my child." He pointed to Nizra who was standing at his elbow, curiously surveying the Herculean, red-shocked son of Mars.

"This maid?" the soldier gasped; it seemed, he had not noticed her before. He halted, and hawed, and then pushed back his eagle-mounted helmet: "By the druids and hobgoblins of the Neagh<sup>1</sup> and the Sind,"<sup>2</sup> he exploded "she is one of them! Rift me in two, if she is not the prettiest girl I have seen since I left my island home! Come, little one," he coaxed her; "I will not hurt even a hair of thee!" But Nizra did not "come"; yet, she must have relished his burst of admiration, for she bowed to him with a smile as she took her father's arm. "*Mehercule!*"<sup>3</sup> he continued muttering to himself, "old Diana is not even a picture of her, and giddy Venus is a very hip-tree to compare with this fair blossom! A very sprite of the woods!—Funstan," he said, nudging his companion in the ribs on going out, "Funstan, I shall surely

<sup>1</sup> A large lake in Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> *Sind* is the ancient name of the Shannon: from Sanscrit *Sindhu*, the River; as *Indus*, "the River of India."

<sup>3</sup> "By Hercules!"

quit the military if she smiles at me once more!"

"Always the same milky-mouthed calf," rejoined Funstan, wearily; "Hibernian,<sup>1</sup> thou hast fire in thy dome—as the glow of thy hair showeth! In Rome thou wert foolish over the black tresses of the *puellae procaces*,<sup>2</sup> in Pannonia,<sup>3</sup> over the nimble feet of the dancers, and on the Rhine didst squander thy pay to dress up the waxen-faced dolls of the Teutons. Thou art a fool, Hibernian, as I have often told thee to no profit. This nymph from the depths of the Euphrates or the Indus is a witch as they all have proved to be. Take sense, Hibernian, and look thee for a pair of strong arms to smooth thy pillow, and to set thy head aright."

"*Facunde Scote, Carissime Funstane*,"<sup>4</sup> roared Rufus, the Hibernian, and made a lunge at the scoffer's head with his fist; "such knave as thou, whose taste is suited with a cold carrot and a horn of honey-water, need not be choice about picking a wife; thou hast not the good taste of a fox, to court the vanity of a shoat, when the world is full of tender geese! Thou art content to court thy like; but I look for the best; I shall woo a queen ere thou hast learned to keep step to the cymbal! Avast, Funstan! If

<sup>1</sup> Man from Hibernia, Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Impudent girls.

<sup>3</sup> Hungary.

<sup>4</sup> "Witty Scot, cherished Funstan!"

thou turn an eye on the maid, I shall turn thee down over my knee.—Trust us, sir,” he at last turned to Caspar, “to stake our three lives against three scores of bandits!”

After this lightning exchange of compliments, unintelligible to the travelers, because it was carried on the greater part in the native tongue of the disputants, the two friends and their comrade assisted their charges in mounting the dromedaries, sprang on their own mounts, and awaited the command of Caspar to depart.

On the way, Rufus pressed his horse as close to the dromedary of Nizra as possible, and offered her his cloak as a protection; the night air was becoming quite chill, as they rode out of the valley of the Jordan, and scaled the hills of Juda. But Nizra thanked him most courteously, and slyly counseled him to keep his armor covered; “thy breast would offer a target not to be missed even by a novice at the bow,” she remarked, complimenting him on the breadth of his chest.

The first hour of the journey wore away slowly and tediously. They were all well armed and well protected against a stray missile from behind a pile of rocks, or from out a thicket; but they were in a strange country, where, to all appearances, the hand of everyone was raised against the other, and where they

sorely missed that friendly, blandishing atmosphere of welcome, which had surrounded them in the countries they had so far crossed. The sharp, cool and damp night-air and the chilly vapors rising around them out of the dells and from the beds of the rills and creeks of the mountainous elevation, were not more empty of cheer and joy than the hearts of their present hosts. But after a while, when even the quarreling of their Roman guards had subsided to a sullen silence, Melchior shook off the oppression, and related to his companions the story of his calling to the cradle of the newborn King.

He was born near Saba,<sup>1</sup> he said, the ancient capital of Ethiopia, as the son of the prince of Sabæa, the province in which the capital was situated. After his education in the school of the national sanctuary, the temple, was completed, he went in search of secret knowledge into Egypt, where copies of the ancient holy books of the Hebrews fell into his hands. He applied himself diligently to the study of the Greek language, in which the books were written, and also received instructions both in Hebrew and in the interpretation of the mystic language of the prophets from a Hebrew scribe at Heliopolis. Thus he became acquainted with

<sup>1</sup> The Meroe of Cambyses (Jewish Antiq., II, 10, 1).

the character of the expectations of the Jews, and with the prophetic image of their Savior.

“When I learned that the venerable patriarch Jacob, in blessing Ephraim and Manasses, the sons of Joseph,” he continued, “laid the hand of his blessing upon the head of the younger boy at the displeasure of Joseph,<sup>1</sup> and blest Ephraim with the blessing of the promise of Abraham, I knew that the hand of God was upon the seed of Ephraim, *‘until the desire of the everlasting hills should come upon the head of Joseph and upon the crown of the Nazarite among his brethren.’*<sup>2</sup> Then my teacher pointed to the blessing of Moses, which repeated that blessing of Jacob two hundred years later,<sup>3</sup> over the tribe of Ephraim; and at last to the vision of Balaam. ‘The time is at hand,’ my teacher had assured me; ‘for,’ said he, ‘the scepter is wrested from Judah, and usurped by Edom; <sup>4</sup> the Expectation of Israel must appear within this generation.’ ”

As soon as Melchior had finished, Nizra asked him anxiously: “Who is the Nazarite, of whom Jacob speaks?”

“He is the Beautiful one, the Sprout of David, the Flower sprung up from the Root,”

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xlviii. 11-20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. xlix. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Herod was an Idumean.

Melchior answered, wondering a little at her anxiety.

"Is not my name *Nizra*?" she pressed her father; "father! Am I not to become the sister of the king?—Nazarite, *Nizra*, *Netzer*," she recounted, and added, almost shouting her startling deduction: "*Nizra*, the bride of the Prince: flower and flower blooming together, the *Netzer* from Heaven, and *Nizra*, His elected!"

Funstan and Duncan had been riding in the rear of the cavalcade while the Hibernian had placed himself at the head after they entered the dangerous path of the forest. Funstan had overheard the narrative of Melchior and the ecstatic exclamation of *Nizra*. Now he spurred his horse and rode alongside the leader.

"She is already promised, friend," he whispered into Rufus's ear, not without a faint ring of mischief in his tone; "she is the sister of a king, and her lover is a prince; wean thee of thy lofty pretensions, brother; mayhap a 'shoat' and a 'cold carrot' must also suffice thee for comfort."

"Away with thee," cried Rufus; "I have even now been building a castle for her in— in—" "Oh, in the air," supplemented Funstan, and barely declined in time the clenched fist of his pugnacious brother in arms; "thou



ownest not ground enough to plant thy own tombstone, not to think of castles," he cried at him, stopping his steed, so as to drop out of the reach of Rufus's hands. But Rufus had already forgotten the tilt, and had relapsed into silence.

Whether Funstan had also been bewitched by the fair maid, did not trouble the doughty Hibernian; in a contest of prowess for the favor of Nizra, his chances of victory were far better, if not for his greater strength and skill, at least for his constant practice. But Rufus was not so devoid of judgment as even seriously to think of capturing the "pretty butterfly from the rose gardens of Persia," as he called her in his heart. Her grace, her exquisite beauty, and her maidenly delicacy, had not failed to impress him deeply, as they should; but he realized that the suit of any one but a prince for her hand, were idle. And Rufus's sense was as hard and sound as it was quick and tender.

The cause of his silence was of a more practical nature. His term of enlistment had expired, and he was hesitating and doubting whether he should pledge his honor and his life for another term of sixteen long years to the banner of his legion. The prefect of the

*Prima Britannica* <sup>1</sup> would be glad to take him back; but Rufus had been rudely separated from that body. About two years before, when a new legion was sent to Cæsarea, to re-enforce the army of Asia on account of the constant disturbances in Palestine, his prefect had allowed him to be drafted with the new cohort. It was an honor to be selected for dangerous and difficult service; but he had had to leave his countrymen and friends behind, and had not been made quite comfortable among the almost exclusively Italian legionaries of his new station. He had never forgiven his old captain for having permitted him to be drafted for service in the land of the ill-natured and crafty Jews.

He had two days before ridden down to Jericho from Jerusalem, and had met his two old friends, who were stationed anywhere in Syria wherever the Legate would sojourn. They were members of that official's bodyguard, who was temporarily residing at Jericho to spend part of the severe winter in the mild climate of that gay and more than half pagan city. The Legate had granted his faithful custodians a spell of relief from their grinding duties.

An excursion to the old capital of Judaism had been agreed upon the day before, but had

<sup>1</sup> The "First Britannic Legion."

been postponed on account of an abundance of funds, which had rained down upon them from the sky.

On the previous day, three young men had put up their beasts at the inn, and had made anxious inquiries after a troop of pilgrims from the land of the Persians. Being informed that no persons whom the glowing description fitted, had passed through the city, they inquired after the shortest road to Jerusalem, and were directed by the three legionaries to engage a company of armed guides, as the roads were unsafe. Funstan and Duncan attended to the hazardous task for them, and were most generously rewarded with a handful of gold.

Yesterday they had not given the occurrence any thought beyond rejoicing in their unexpected wealth; but now the coincidence of their journey in the company of this troop, who most accurately answered the description given by the youths, with the anxious inquiry of yesterday, brought Rufus to a sudden understanding of their relation. He wheeled about, stood aside, and awaited the approach of Caspar.

"Hast not sent a messenger ahead?" he asked; "a man inquired after thee yesterday at the inn."

"I have not," answered Caspar, surprised

and confused; "what may he have desired?"

"He did not tell us, why he sought thee; but he went up to the city."

"Dost know whence he came?"

"To judge from his appearance, he came from thy country."

"Young?"

"Quite; and bold, and proud of bearing."

"His name?"

But before Rufus could reply, Nizra gasped: "Marut!" And Rufus added: "If I heard aright, that was his name; his two companions usually addressed him as prince Mar—, Mor—Ut, or something similar. Knowest him?" he asked Caspar.

"The son of our king," Caspar responded with evident lack of affection.

"There is more of this, and more there is to come," soliloquized Rufus, and perceiving that his presence was not desired after the manifestly unpleasant discovery, rode on to re-assume the lead of the troop.

They plodded along in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts, which it was plain everyone dreaded to reveal. The Ethiopians were indeed ignorant of Marut's position towards the Chaldeans,<sup>1</sup> but they surmised from

<sup>1</sup> Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians were often classed together under that general name, although not correctly.

the instantaneous change of Caspar's, and also of Nizra's manner, that the news of his arrival, and of his inquiry after them, was anything but an agreeable surprise. Nizra in particular seemed to be disturbed and embarrassed beyond what would be deemed the extreme of emotion in a maiden of her quiet, peaceful, and gentle disposition. She would sigh, brush over her brow with a hand which was holding the guiding line of her mount, and restlessly shift her position, push her veil back over her shoulders, first on one side of the head, and then on the other—where Melchior caught sight of the golden circlet under her headgear—or flick an imaginary speck from her robe, and in general behave like one anticipating some severe ordeal. She had been riding a long time between Caspar and Balthassar, directly ahead of Melchior; but in the general confusion of mind over the astonishing information, that Marut had executed the threat made in her garden, she had insensibly lost her lead over the Ethiopians, and had dropped back into their midst, still in the thrall of her anxiety.

The moon had risen over the desert of Juda towards their left, and was weaving its silvery webs into the scant and soppy vegetation between the dripping rocks, and spreading the thousand charms of its twinkling rays in glit-

tering and gleaming gems in prodigal profusion over the trees and shrubs of the hills, on whose crest they were silently moving forward towards the great, mysterious capital of the hallowed Land of the Jews.

Melchior would fain speak a word of encouragement or of sympathy to Nizra; but not knowing the nature of her grievance against Marut, he would not risk striking a false key by intruding his sympathy, where it might be received only as veiled curiosity. If Nizra's grief remained concealed, it must be too sensitive, and perhaps too fresh to be soothed. But it was uncomfortable in the extreme to see her suffer, and to be obliged by the conventionalities of public intercourse, which regard not the universal brotherhood of man, to abstain even from offering a simple word of comfort! Melchior confessed to himself, that he had never before so thoroughly rebelled against the restraints of conventional propriety; they were a necessary defense, he conceded, against the imposition of the discomforts of odious familiarity; but they were none the less a check and trammel upon kindness and good-fellowship. "Ay," he said, unconsciously yielding to his resentment, "if all men were free from cunning!"

At the sound of his querulous voice, Nizra

raised her head with a start, pulled the ends of her veil over her shoulders, and gathered them over her breast; she had not quite recovered from her deep abstraction, and probably was not conscious of the presence of her dusky friends about her. They were climbing up the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, and the wind, which announced the approach of the short hours of the morning, was blowing up brisk and sharp across the exposed hillside. Nizra also drew in her coat more closely, and pulled the hood of it over her head; she was surely suffering from the ill-conceived brusqueness of the morning's chill message. But it assisted her awakening to her surroundings not a little. When she turned her soft gaze on Melchior, her face slowly relaxed from its anxiety, and was dimpling and rippling over with a sweet, timid smile, like the face of a child tenderly taken out of slumber. "By the stars of heaven," Melchior admitted under his breath as she turned her head away in the direction of her father, "no wonder that this Marut, whoever he be, should travel across the earth to woo her! An angel of flesh and blood, 'pon my troth!"

But she urged her dromedary with a pat on the neck, and rejoined the group about her father.

On the summit of Mount Olivet they dismounted at the suggestion of Rufus; it was too early, he explained, to ride into the city, and they had better rest a little after the long ride, and refresh themselves, as they would be hurried from officer to priest and from patrol to guard-house, he ventured to submit, ere they would obtain admission to either high-priest or king. "They are sore against all strangers," he said, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "Since Publius Sulpicius Quirinius<sup>1</sup> has succeeded in obtaining their consent to the Imperial Census, and they have been counted like sheep for the tax lists of Rome, they have conceived an unreasoning fear of losing their nationality, and a hatred of everything foreign entering the gates of their city. Ye may not find leisure to eat your bread; so strengthen yourselves before you set out for your mission."

Rufus's advice, so well suited to the palpable atmosphere of hostility and sullenness, was not to be neglected. He was acquainted with the condition of the country and the capital, and was manifestly sincere in his concern for the welfare of the pilgrims. Hence they opened

<sup>1</sup> Associated at that time with Sentius Saturninus, the Governor of Syria.



their hampers, reclined on the mats spread out over the damp ground, and broke fast.

The skies were beginning to blush in the eastern horizon. The mystic city lay quiet, dark and gloomy at their feet. The palace of Herod, perched like a splendidly attired and equipped gigantic watchman on the crest of Mount Sion, seemed to turn a threatening brow over towards the great white temple, rising out of the horrible depths of the Kidron, the petrified glory of proud Israel. The Antonia, a colossal fortress of defiant mien, cast its dark shadow even into the portal of the House of God. Nor was the double belt of walls, which tightly girded the Daughter of Sion, an emblem of peace and security. Jerusalem presented not the appearance of a royal spouse, who had taken the Son of God to her bosom; nay, she wore the frown of hostile mistrust.

Caspar had entertained a growing respect for the obliging Rufus from the first moment of their meeting at the inn of Quintus. On the way, the sober silence and the pensive mood of the soldier had not escaped the notice of the observant sage. He was wondering whether Rufus knew aught of the appearance of the newborn King of the Jews, and whether his erratic and fitful manner of treating the hosteler and his own comrades might stand in some

relation to this knowledge. The sullen silence of all Judea, the absence of every trace of joy and gladness in the face of an event, the news of which should have filled the land from end to end with the echo of the rejoicings of the Jews, well agreed with the wariness of Rufus to avoid the mention of the all-important subject. He must be informed; it was inconceivable that a man, whose position offered daily occasions to perceive every whisper and breath of the unruly subjects of Rome, should be ignorant of the appearance of a new dawn upon the jealous hopes of Judea for the long sought Deliverer.

With the ripening of this conclusion, Caspar resolved to test the soldier's religious persuasions.

"Rufus, friend," he began solemnly, "we know not how to requite thee thy care over us. Thou knowest not, whether we be enemies or friends of thy colors. And yet thou hast guided and protected us on this dangerous and difficult journey without asking a reward." Then he drew a golden chain from his bosom, and offered it to Rufus: "Accept this as a token of our gratitude!"

Rufus pushed back his helmet over the top of his head with an impatient and petulant movement of one hand, while he raised the other

in indignant protest against the precious gift. A profanity seemed readier than a compliment to spring from his lips.

“What? Nay! Not for me!” he blustered; “if thou wilt not be pleased to accept my conduct free and *gratis*,—*mehercle!*—go and seek thy king alone!” And he sprang to his feet, gesticulating, and scolding alternately in Latin and in his own barbaric tongue, and stalked towards his charger, as much offended as a pheasant cooped up in an ordinary hen-house. “*Me*—hobgoblins<sup>1</sup> and wraiths of the tarns of Erin,” he exploded once more, and turned around; “ye will be pestered to death by the publicans and the curious shopkeepers, unless ye be under the buckler of a soldier; I will forgive thee, and guide thee at any rate!”

“Then accept my profound thanks,” Caspar begged him, and added with an effort at pacifying the explosive touch-me-not: “Thou art nobler far than many of thy fellows, and I am surely much gratified at discovering an unselfish heart beneath the coat of Mars.”

Rufus immediately became all serenity and peace. He again sat down, a little closer to Caspar than before, and replied with utmost condescension: “The sons of Mars are no

<sup>1</sup> *Me*—(*hercle*): supplementing the Latin exclamation with one of his own language.

worse than war makes them; a little bolder than hucksters, and a little more sensitive than women. That is the effect of their discipline and their glory; they are sure of themselves at every turn."

"How knowest that we seek a king?"

Caspar put his question thus indefinitely, in order to force Rufus to a decisive counter-question, if he knew of the "king" besides Herod, the object of their quest.

"Because the air of Judea is as full of rumors as of gnats," Rufus replied, deftly sweeping with an open hand through a swarm of the pests dancing before his face, "and thou art not the first to take interest in the idle talk of the rustics. They have set all Jerusalem by the ears. The shepherds down on the slopes have been inspired by some wily patriot or pretender. But the simple countryfolk refused to spread the story after they learned that it must rouse the cruelty of Herod against them; they have become as uncommunicative as the owls of the solitude. Three days ago, on my journey to Jericho by the highroad, I sounded several of them, all maidens and women; but they laughed at my curiosity, and told me to inquire after a scion of royalty in Rome, and not in a province of Syria, or in a rural district, where a prince would not be known, even if he ap-

peared, 'unless he came right from heaven,' one pert little wench interposed. In the city, the rumor has caused no end of anxiety to the priests and the elders, and they have silenced it with all their authority; they would be the first to hail the advent of a deliverer, if they knew of it, and cast out Herod, and the Romans also, by force of arms. It is an empty dream of some political mountebank."

But Caspar had detected the rays of a heavenly manifestation also in the circumstances of Rufus's tale. The allusion of the "pert little wench" to "the royal child who would have to come from heaven" to be recognized, and the disturbed priests and elders, and their diligence in suppressing the mysterious report, pointed to a fact, an event, at first told with the gladsome freshness of its sweet novelty, and afterwards concealed for the fear of its effect on the king, and on the excited populace. He would proceed guardedly with his examination; Rufus was so ready to talk, that another question might empty him of all he knew without his suspecting that Caspar knew more even than he.

"Has not Rome herself sighed after a god-child?" Caspar resumed, innocently eying his surprised informant.

Rufus looked like one standing behind a wall,

who can barely raise his eyes over the impediment, and, therefore, cannot survey the things that are below the rigid line of his vision. The question seemed to overwhelm him with crowding reminiscences of just such uncanny legends as the question of Caspar suggested. A god-child? Why, surely he had heard of it; a thousand times; at home, in Rome, in Jerusalem, everywhere, in tale and fable!<sup>1</sup> But he had never thought more of it than of the other superstitious legends of folklore; and he fiercely struggled against and grappled with the idea.

Indeed he had heard of it! Virgil had sung of it,<sup>2</sup> and the vision of Emperor Augustus<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Celts venerated a goddess, who was a virgin; of her a son was expected to be born. In 1833 a stone was found at *Chalons sur Marne* on the site of an ancient pagan temple bearing the following inscription: "To the Virgin who shall bear (a son), dedicated by the Druids." Tacitus (*Germania*, c. IX) says: "Part of the Suabians also sacrifice to Isis. Whence the cause and origin of this foreign cult, I could hardly discover; except that the idol, formed like a galley, points to an imported religion."

Now Isis was the chief goddess of the Egyptians, and was represented as sailing on a boat, and her statue was set up on a boat: Isis was the god-mother, the Virgin, the goddess of the Celtic Druids (*Comp. Hom.*, p. 390 ff. See also *Maas*, *St. Matthew*).

<sup>2</sup> The celebrated verses of Virgil (*Ecloga IV*), are the following:

*"Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas,  
Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo:  
Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,  
Iam nova progenies coelo demittitur alto."*

"The final epoch of which the Sibyl sings has arrived; a new order of things shall be inaugurated over the whole earth: the Virgin returns amid universal rejoicing, and a new generation descends from the height of heaven."

<sup>3</sup> Of Augustus, ancient writers report that one day, as he

had been debated long and exhaustively by the *Pontifices* and *Flamines*<sup>1</sup> of Rome. The soldiers had rehearsed it in the barracks—and ridiculed it; the Jews had heard of it; the priests in Jerusalem had said: “Why should *He* send *His* message to a worldly prince instead of revealing the accomplishment of His promises to the high-priest?” About a year ago, one of the priests<sup>2</sup> was struck dumb during the incense-offering in the Holy of Holies, and afterwards the people of the Judean hill country spread the story that the god-child<sup>3</sup> was born, and had reopened the lips of his father. But all these rumors had disappeared without leaving a tangible trace. And in these last few weeks, the same rumors of heavenly messengers and of a heavenly birth!

“Where there is smoke, there’s fire,” argued Rufus within himself; if he only knew how to begin! He was filling up with so much lore of godly things, that his eagerness to dispose of it rendered him helpless. At last he decided to

came down one of the Roman hills, he saw a vision in the sky, about which he consulted the Delphian Oracle. The priestess replied:

“A Hebrew boy, himself a god, and ruling gods,  
Bids me give up my throne, and fly to hell:  
Hence, go thy way in silence from our shrines!”

Cicero (Lib. II de Divin.) tells us that the Delphian Oracle ceased to prophesy about that time.

<sup>1</sup> Two classes of Roman priests.

<sup>2</sup> Zachary.

<sup>3</sup> John the Baptist.

say one thing after another, since it was impossible to say everything at once.

"O Lord prince," he blurted, "the god-child is to come on the clouds, is to become the greatest king of the earth, of the whole earth, is the son of a virgin, shall never die, shall quell all strife, and shall reign forever! He shall be the son of the *Pater Magnus*!"

"Who is the *Pater Magnus*?" Caspar interrupted his rapid declamation; Rufus had employed the Latin name in his haste to deliver himself of his pent-up wisdom.

"*Pater Magnus*?" he repeated, sobering a little. "Oh," he laughed, "thou art a stranger to the tongue of Rome!"

"But it sounds so like '*Pita-maha*,'" Caspar continued, "which recalls to my mind the ancient traditions of my own people."

"And what is *Pita-maha*, pray," Rufus temporized.

"It means 'the Great Father,' '*Dyaus Pitar*,' the Father-god, the God of Light and Knowledge."

"*Pater Magnus* means exactly the same; and thy '*Dyaus Pitar*' is surely the '*Zeus-Jupiter*' of the Greeks and the Romans, and their modern *deus-pater*, or *Diespiter*,<sup>1</sup> 'Father-god'!

<sup>1</sup> *Diespiter* (Jupiter) of Horace, *Carm. Lib. I*, 34, 5, and *III*, 2, 29. The interpretation: *Diei Pater* (father of the day),



Ah, Caspar, I begin to see through these hazy hopes and rumors in the Jewish lands! *Merhercle!*—This is another of their scores of gods—every well has a bottom; but thou hast fetched the water from a depth that makes me dizzy; these Jews must know more than they deem wise to tell the Gentiles!”

At that moment a little shepherd boy, with wet and touseled hair and scant clothing was seen climbing up the hill, casting timid but curious glances at the strange pomp of their costumes and at the strange beasts. As he was about to pass them, Rufus beckoned to him, and he approached, cautiously and humbly, crossing his arms in reverence over his breast.

“It is one of the boys from the pastures beyond,” Rufus remarked to Caspar, and when the boy had drawn near, he asked kindly: “What is thy name, my little man?” and drew him down on his knees, directly in front of Nizra, who had all the time silently sat at her father’s side.

“My name is Joseph Ben Sadoc,” the boy breathed.

“Take courage, Joseph, Son of Justice,” Rufus continued, and drew a coin from his wallet,

manifestly lacks freshness. We should prefer to think that *dies* is a weakening and softening of the old *Dyaus*, as *Piter* is a plain imitation of *Pita* or *Pitar*. See also *Gutberlet, Der Mensch*, pp. 591, ff.

which he held up before the boy's eyes. But Joseph did not seem eager to accept the bribe.

"Whence art come?"

"From Bethlehem."

"And art bound—"

"On an errand to my cousin." He spoke slowly, nervously, and haltingly.

"To tell him of the lovely babe who has come from heaven?" Joseph changed color, and began to tremble; his lips were half-open with terror, but they remained mute.

"Answer me, Joseph!" Rufus commanded sternly.

"I may not," the frightened child lisped.

"I shall take thee before Herod!"

Joseph's face grew a shade paler; but he replied with absolute resignation: "Take me!"

"There!" Rufus turned towards Caspar; "I have made this experience ere now: they would rather be flayed than betray their religious secrets to a Gentile."

Now Nizra drew the boy over to herself, seated him in her lap, and brushed the damp hair back from his clammy brow. "My little man will tell *me*," she said coaxingly, "that he has seen the child who was brought down by the angels?" Joseph sobbed, but raised his tearful eyes to her with an unmistakable look of affirmation and assurance. And Nizra raised

him to his feet, and bade him proceed on his mission. "Be not afraid of the fiery-headed soldier," she said, casting a gleeful glance at Rufus; "he is as gentle as he is big and brave."

Joseph hurried away across the hill with the haste of a hare.

Now the sun was risen, and they remounted, and with throbbing hearts rode down the western slope of Mount Olivet, towards the city of the great new King.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WAYS OF GOD

Meanwhile the Holy City and its immediate neighborhood had fallen a prey to a most uncommon, mystifying dread. Despite the most desperate efforts of the leaders in Jerusalem, the report of the birth of the Savior would not down. A great number of the upper classes had become fast friends of the Romans and partisans of Herod and had thus conceived a disaffection for the religious image of the coming Messias, and were harboring in their hearts a feeling akin to the dread of the day of judgment. Others who had preserved the hope for deliverance at the hands of a king to be sent of God according to the ancient prophecies and promises, had also, however, been eye-witnesses of the unmeasured ferocity of Herod against the very semblance and suspicion of Jewish pretensions to the throne of David, and, therefore, were no less dismayed at the tempting news.

Only three years before, Herod had put to death his two sons Aristobulus and Alexander; some months before, he had two zealous rabbis

burnt at the stake. Under their direction a golden eagle, fastened by the Romans over the gate of the temple, had been torn down in a tumultuous riot. The other atrocious murders committed at his order during his long reign of thirty-seven years are too numerous to be recounted in detail.

Herod, goaded on by insane ambition and the unscrupulous flatteries of his courtiers, held himself to be the King of the prophecies. For, had not the dying patriarch Jacob foretold, that "the scepter shall not pass from Judah, and the ruler from his loins, until the Expectation of the nations cometh"? And was Herod not the first ruler of Israel, who was not of the tribe and family of Judah? Was the new King not to reign over Jews and Gentiles alike? And had Herod not acquired dominion, not only over the whole land of the Jews, but also over the Arabs beyond the Jordan, and over the Idumites of the South? And who could foretell that he was not destined to overthrow the mighty Roman empire, and assume the purple of Augustus?

Such considerations and suggestions had bred in the breast of Herod that spirit of indomitable pride, which acknowledges no responsibility, and rears up at the thought of restraint. He was supreme on earth, the representative

of the ancient theocracy of Israel; nay, the equal of their God-king.

The leaders in the capital, whom the hand of Rome had protected in gathering immense wealth and in ascending to the highest positions in the government of their enslaved brethren, had every reason to dread the impending weeding of the Messias; and those who would gladly have welcomed a return to the old state of Israel under her own princes, feared a new and destructive eruption of the vengeance of Herod. Hence all Jerusalem bided with bated breath the moment when some unforeseen occurrence would thrust the timid rumors of the miraculous advent of the Savior upon the public, and release the stifled voice of universal, but fatal exultation.

Jerusalem was well aware of the recent happenings at Bethlehem. In the first burst of their joy the simple shepherd folk had told and retold the appearance of the angels of God in the night, the beauty and grace of the infant "Son of David," the poverty of His cradling, the humility and purity of His mother. They had boasted to their friends and relatives in the city of their privilege of offering the first gifts of fealty at his feet, of their preferment before the inhabitants of the royal city. They had reminded them most earnestly, that Beth-

lehem was in truth the city of David, His father, and that, therefore, there was in reality no injury done the national capital. Their friends had come down to the scene of the Savior's advent, had inspected his humble abode—and had gone away, more disappointed than ever. Others had taken up their position at a safe distance from the stall, not to fall under the suspicion of believing the "gossip" of the country-folk, and disdainfully watched the simple visitors of "the new King" go in and out, and returned to their homes with no dominant sentiment, but the dread of Herod's hasty resolve to punish the whole vicinity of Jerusalem and Bethlehem for their treasonable credulity.

But once alive, the report of the glorious event gained both splendor and vigor from the enthusiasm of the pious. At His circumcision, which was witnessed by many pious Israelites, it was noticed that His 'father' insisted upon giving Him the name "Jesus," as the angel of God had directed; at His presentation in the Temple, one of the most glorious and at the same time, most ominous, prophecies was pronounced by Simeon, a man noted for his piety and zeal in the service of God, and not at all an enthusiast of the stripe of the Zealots and other ambitious patriots.

These various signs of the interest of Heaven in His advent and His mission never allowed the scorn of the scoffers to become reckless, or the premonition of the accomplishment of God's own time, to die out. They lent courage to the joy of the believers, and they disconcerted the unbelievers. At last even the priests felt obliged to investigate the matter, and having concluded that it was safer to await a turn in the government, which could not be delayed much longer in view of Herod's condition, than to give the strange rumors countenance by their official examination, they discouraged at first, and at last plainly forbade their open discussion.

The Bethlehemites were the first to realize the peril of their precious ward in the event of Herod's laying a hand on their town. The child, therefore, was sheltered in a family of trustworthy friends, and the strictest abstinence from discussion was enjoined, and agreed upon by common consent.

Herod himself, indeed, had not long been kept in ignorance of the "idle gossip." Whatever consideration might move a Jew to hold his counsel in his presence, had no weight with his pagan and semi-pagan adherents, and least with the Roman officials, some of whom would re-



joice to vex and harass the brutal "*Rex Judæorum*"<sup>1</sup> at any cost. They had insinuated to him the undying attachment of his subjects to the olden promises embodied in the story of the Heavenly child; but, because the taunt was launched from those suspicious quarters, Herod, suffering from the gout and from some malignant intestinal disease, paid little attention to the malicious tale-bearers.

The Wisemen from the East had asked their startling question: "Where is the King of the Jews that is born?" in every city and town through which they had passed since they entered Palestine. In the beginning, they asked joyfully, boldly, in the spirit of brotherhood, which they believed was uniting all nations into the one great family of God under the scepter of the newborn Ruler of Jacob and the Gentiles. But the people had stared and wondered at them, and had dubiously pointed the way to Jerusalem. The ardor of the disappointed pilgrims cooled and they gradually proposed their object timidly, tentatively, and with the caution of mistaken men, and at last in the manner of an irrelevant possibility. Yet they had not turned back, but with an unshakable confidence

<sup>1</sup> "King of the Jews;" the title *rex* had then little of its prestige of later centuries. In comparison to the Roman '*Imperator*,' it is a mockery.

in the guidance of Heaven, had moved forward to the gates of the Holy City of the Jews.

They had spent many an hour in humble prayer for courage and enlightenment, with the result that they alone, in all the land, continued on their quest, and pursued the faint traces of God's finger, which the Jews themselves neglected and despised. The latest discovery of universal apprehension at the cruelty of Herod had oppressed them much more than their former daily experience of the apathy of the Savior's countrymen. But could not He, who had called them to the cradle of His Son, protect Him against the dangers threatening from the jealousy of an earthly king? They would not go to Herod; they would go to the priests of the Temple for advice.

That morning, therefore, when they entered the city—a troop of strangers from far eastern countries, much admired by the idlers in the streets both for the novelty of their type of features and for the magnificence of their raiment and the trappings of their mounts—they silently wended their way towards the Temple, with an ever growing multitude of curious admirers in their train. At the foot of the Temple mount they were received with scowling faces by a deputation of scribes and Levites, who, to all appearances, had been ad-

vised beforehand of the arrival and the object of the strangers.

Rufus and his comrades, who did not wish to implicate the soldiers of Sentius Saturninus in the religious quarrels of the Jews, had taken leave of them as soon as they were well under way towards their goal. But Rufus had described to them an inn in the vicinity of the Moriah, where they could find accommodation if perchance they should meet with delay.

Before the head of the scribes had had time to give them warning, which he intimated by significantly laying his hand on his mouth, Caspar, the spokesman, had moved forward towards a position where he was visible to the immense throng of the curious at his rear, and where his voice must be heard by all. The scribes had not descended to the street to meet them; they had stationed themselves on the second terrace of the magnificent stairs which led into the Beautiful Court of Solomon. Hence Caspar had dismounted, and had slowly and solemnly ascended the first terrace.

As he tossed back his headcloth, revealing the white cords and silver tassels of his tiara, the insignia of his priestly dignity, a reverent silence fell over the curious multitude. Every ear was strained, every eye was intently fixed on his lips.

“Whom seek ye?” the scribe asked in a low, cautious, and haughty tone.

And Caspar answered with a clear, resonant and humble voice, which bore the echo of an inspired heart: “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His Star in the East, and are come to adore Him!”

The fatal word had fallen!

Immediately there followed a confusion of exclamations of terror, of reproach, of protest, with a cry of delight here and there, none the less clear and hearty for the general hostility.

The members of the priestly delegation looked over the heads of the tumultuous masses with flaming eyes and blanched faces. “Silence, silence!” shouted the leader, and frantically shook his napkin at the senseless offenders. Then he beckoned to Caspar, and also to Melchior and Balthassar and several more of their company who had all dismounted, anticipating an invitation to visit the Temple, and conducted them into the courts.

The noise had attracted the attention of a patrol of very matter-of-fact Herodian bailiffs, who, at a sign from the retreating scribes, held back the crowd from the entrance of the upper gate, and pointed out the way to the inn to the servants of the Eastern princes and to Nizra. They took up the bridles of the free drome-

daries and rode away, the street being cleared before them by application of force and violence.

At the inn, a new surprise awaited them: Marut and his two companions received them at the door. The young prince solicitously busied himself about Nizra with delicate attentions. He expressed his surprise at their tardiness: "I started out a week after you departed, and behold, I have arrived here before you! I took the southern route, and still I have preceded you in entering the royal city. Where have you tarried? Thou dost look way-worn, and sore, Nizra!"

But Nizra made no reply to his gush and gabble other than casting a glance of reproach at him, and withdrawing her hands from his reach. He manifested his disappointment at her reserve and distance by petulantly insisting: "I must take care of thy welfare in the absence of thy father; let me invite thee to my table which is set apart for me alone as becometh the scion of the Kings of Persia! Let me kiss thy hand, at least, in token of my adoration!" And again he searched for her hand in the folds of her cloak; but again she withdrew, and disdained to answer him.

"Nizra," he continued heatedly, "Nizra, if thou do persevere in thy cruelty, I shall cast

off my life! It is of no value and interest to me unless thou bestow value and interest upon it by thy love! Nizra!—I entreat thee, not thus to torture me, to consign me to the pangs of jealousy and hope contending within me for the possession of my soul! Take me; I will be thy servant, thy slave, thy footstool, as faithful and as happy as a dog<sup>1</sup> about the feet of its master! Speak, Nizra; wilt not be mine?"

"Wilt thou be *His*?" she asked him earnestly, pointing a finger towards the majestic structure of the Temple rising up before them on the opposite mount in the fiery glow of the morning sun like a gigantic white altar, placed in the midst of the world as the dwelling place of the Lord of Heaven.

Marut was dumb with surprise. Was this the reason for her reluctance, his refusal to accept the "superstition" of her father? He would probe a little deeper.

"If I accept the God of the Jews," he resumed glowering at her, "I must discard the ambition of becoming king of the Parsa. They have their own gods, the gods of their fathers and of their country, which they are loth to depose for the deity of the Semites. And if I become not king, thou shalt never be a queen.

<sup>1</sup> Persia was probably the only country of antiquity where the dog enjoyed hospitality, and that for religious reasons.

Think of thy destiny! It is written in the stars that thou shalt be the sister of the king, and the bride of a mighty prince! Nizra, do not resist the decrees of fate!"

He had forgotten his resolution to "probe deeper," and had fallen back into his boundless infatuation.

"There is no fate," Nizra answered quietly, "but the will of God. If He wills thee to ascend the throne of the Parsa, thou shalt be made a king even without me for thy wife. But if He wills thee to serve Him in an humble state, and thou refuse, a crown will be a burden to thee, and thy ruin. Resist not the will of God!"

Marut had impatiently listened to her pleading; it was not to his taste to have her exhort him to the service of God, contrary to his purposes and ambitions. "Leave the follies of the Jews," he said bitterly, "and cleave to thy own gods! Come, Nizra!"

He tried to draw her by force into the chamber set apart for his exclusive use, but she tore herself away, and rejoined her servants, leaving him disgraced and wholly disconcerted. His face became livid with rage, and his stare was riveted on her retreating form with a diabolical determination. "Go, dainty Beauty," he snarled; "thou shalt yet crave for mercy at

my hands!"— But did Marut understand the fortitude of faith?—

Yet a few moments later, when he entered his own apartment alone, having waved his two companions aside with a gesture of intolerant scorn, he cast himself upon a couch, at the same time sobbing, weeping and gnashing his teeth. "It is her new God," he groaned; "she would not be yoked together with an infidel! Oh, what misery these rantings about God and gods have heaped up over the heads of the race! And what may a god care about the opinion of a mortal man! What difference can it make, what god I acknowledge, or what I may think concerning the Divine! Were it not worth a kingdom, I too would bend my knee to the new God of the Jews! It would not be much gain for His glory," he concluded with a sneer.

Then he applied himself to his repast. The food was dainty, and deliciously prepared: a dish of partridge from Bashan, light wheaten bread, olives stewed in their own oil, tender lettuce, fresh fruit from the gardens of Genesaret, figs, grapes, nuts and apples, some boiled or baked with sugar and spices, others laid out with the fresh leaves of their native trees and vines, and covered with the fragrant and wholesome dust of the manna and the mastic, to scent and sweeten the breath, and to ex-



cite the palate for the intenser appreciation of the cheering cup.

But Marut was in no mood to enjoy the delicacies. For a while he nibbled here and there, absentmindedly, and without relish; but when he became conscious of his perfunctory feasting, he pushed the food aside, and drew to himself the pot of wine and the gilt cup. After surveying the vessels and taking note of their costliness and size, a guilty smile overspread his lips, but he courageously inclined the large amphora, and filled the bumper. Then he filled also the somewhat smaller cup, of the pretty shape of a pomegranate reposing in a setting of golden leaves and ornamented with ruby-colored stones, evidently prepared for Nizra, his intended companion at meat. He raised his cup to the height of his eyes, pronounced an incantation learnt from the Magi, who had educated him at court, and poured a few drops into the other. Then he repeated his magic formula over Nizra's cup, and poured of it into his own. "To Mithra I swear," he said aloud, as he was about to drink, "that as truly as these draughts are mixed, and bound by magic spell, she shall be mine and shall be bound to me: by the plight of hell!"

He drank, hastily, greedily; but the guilt of

his first perilous venture into the charmed depths of the cup did not leave his face.

The repetition of the temptation ever found him more ready, more compliant, more daring; at last the power of the wine alone, without the allurements of its fragrance and deliciousness, sufficed to enslave his appetite. Amid confused mutterings about "new gods," and "the fascinating elf," he fell over helpless from stupor and the desire of sleep, in the toils of that fearful avenger, the immoderate cup.

In this condition his companions found him towards noon, when the sages returned from the council in the Temple court. Nizra had honestly, although reluctantly, reported his conduct towards her to her father. Caspar was sorely offended.<sup>1</sup> He had not suspected the prince's attentions to his daughter of being so obtrusive and inconsiderate. Nizra also privately revealed his indiscreet visit in the garden on the night of their departure. This offense against the most sacred canons of morality, which were hallowed by the constant practice of their fathers, alone sufficed to bring his suit to naught in the eyes of the aged priest. "At once and forever," he said severely to Nizra,

<sup>1</sup> Drunkenness was considered an unpardonable sin by the followers of Zoroaster.

"his attentions must cease! Make ready to leave this den ere he recover himself from his debauch—although this Syrian wine of ancient vintage holds its victims in harsh durance for a day or two," he added after deciphering the inscription on the amphora, which was lying over on its side, the last drops of its contents slowly trickling through the damask table cover.

In the court of the Temple, the pilgrims had not been treated very kindly, nor even very respectfully. The scribes and Levites, and the elders who had been summoned, were anxious to impress them with the danger to all the people threatening from the insane fury of the king, whose grim temper was not mollified by the pains and tortures of his disease. They artfully endeavored to persuade them, that the report of the miraculous event was a myth, the stupid and ill-timed joke of some enemy to the public peace. "But His Star!" the sages had protested; "His Star, of which your own books bear the undeniable record, is neither myth nor intrigue: We have seen it in the East!"

"It cannot be!" the scribes objected; "our holy books mention it merely as a *symbol* of the Messias; and why has it deserted you? Why has it not appeared in *our* skies? You have missed your way; if magic star it was, it might be the forerunner of a mighty prince

in the East; there it shone, and there is to be sought the object of its appearance. Go, return, return to your own countries!"

In such manner the contest proceeded without definite results for more than an hour, the Eastern sages compelling the astonishment of the scribes by their manifestation of an accurate understanding of the advent and mission of the Messias, and of a knowledge of both written and unwritten traditions extant among the pagan nations of the East, so consistent with the more definite testimony of the Hebrew scriptures, that they seemed but the faded pattern of the ancient Jewish prophecies themselves.

But every new proof of the futility of their defense infuriated the haughty scribes the more. And, to add to their embarrassment and anxiety, the throngs in the streets emptying into the large open square at the foot of the Temple mount were ever becoming larger, more boisterous and arrogant in their demand for enlightenment on the mission of the Eastern Magi. As such they had been instantly recognized; as such, their appearance at that time, when all the world was looking towards the land of the Jews for the "Expectation of the nations," bore a significance not to be mistaken by the suffering and persecuted Children of Israel.

For, had it not been plainly foretold: *"I will be mindful of Rahab and Babylon knowing me: Behold the foreigner and Tyre, and the people of the Ethiopians, these were there: . . . the Lord shall tell in writings of people and of princes, of them that have been in her (Sion)"*<sup>1</sup> And again: *"The multitudes of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Madian and Epha: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense: And shewing forth praise to the Lord"*<sup>2</sup>

And even if these prophecies related not directly to the advent of the "Just and Savior," the mere semblance of relation between the sacred hopes of the Jewish people and the sudden appearance of these travelers from distant parts of the earth with the dress and manner of those so often pictured in their dreams, must arouse the enthusiasm and the most ardent curiosity of Jerusalem. The spectators in the impassable streets were burning to learn more of the "Star," to which the pilgrims had pointed as to the witness of their astonishing expectations. Their dread of Herod's blood-stained hand had not indeed been entirely conquered by their newly excited hopes of delivery from his cruel sway, for he had often unex-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxxvi. 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> Is. lx. 6.

pectedly stricken down the most unsuspecting and the most secure; but it had been suppressed in the elation over the approaching deliverance at the hands of God.

During the protracted conference, word of the arrival of the Magi and of their search after the newborn King of the Jews reached the tyrant's ears. He was carried off his feet by the unheard-of audacity; to consult the Jews, forsooth, about a newborn King! His messengers hurried to the Temple, and commanded the scribes to present themselves without delay at the court. The Magi were instantly dismissed amid universal consternation, and the scribes departed in the custody of Herod's armed minions.

But scarcely an hour had passed before they returned to the court of the temple, fretful, angry and dejected. They did not utter their mutual accusations of treason with the reserve so much desired at that moment, when all Jerusalem was hanging on their lips, and a large number of Jerusalem's fanatical children were dogging their steps. The masses had already thrown off the check of their terror, and eagerly snuffed the wind for the final confirmation of the wonderful tidings. "The King of the Jews is born?" some tempted the hurrying councilors of Herod in the streets; "In Bethlehem?"

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others suggested, and waited for an affirmative answer with bated breath and bulging eyes. "Ye have told the ruler of his abode; tell us, too; tell us!" a chorus shouted at them in reckless defiance of the angry admonitions to hold their peace. At last a band of the boldest, led by a Zealot, laid violent hands on the scribes and endeavored to coerce them: "If ye know him, ye shall not betray him, as ye betrayed Judas<sup>1</sup> into the hands of the tyrant! Out with your secret!"

This was open revolt. The popular excitement had broken down the dam. There was no stemming the tide. But it was not necessary for the teachers of the Nation to explicitly confirm the suspicions of the people; the people interpreted their obstinate reticence as the seal of the report, now received by many with terror-stricken hearts, by the greater number with defiant shouting, and by the pious and quiet few, with silent thanksgiving and blissful expectation: The Savior was born, born at Bethlehem, in the city of David, as the prophets had foretold!

The scribes had betrayed the secret of His birthplace by their spiteful ranting at each other on the way from Herod's palace. "Why

<sup>1</sup> The Galilean, who incited the people to rebellion against the census of Quirinius.

hast taken the scroll of Michæas to the court?" one berated their leader, pulling at his garments, and plucking his beard in the vehemence of his rage; "and why hast put thy finger on the passage, which no eye of Gentile has ever seen? Why, why, why hast read out the name of Bethlehem to the ears of our oppressor!"

The indignation and passion of the tormentor was so violent, that he could only stammer out his invective against the traitor. And the people listened, and learned.

Then had arrived the invitation of Herod to the Wisemen at the inn. It had been secretly borne to them by a page, with the order to betake themselves to the palace without delay, but quietly. They should leave their beasts and their servants and all their train at the inn, they had been warned; the king were anxious not to disquiet the people.

Hence Caspar, Melchior, and Balthassar alone followed the page through the less frequented roads along the southeastern wall of the city. The curious multitude had conducted the scribes, and left the streets about Herod's palace comparatively empty. From the gates of the Temple mount they had again been turned away, and hence for a diversion, surged towards the inn where the attendants of the Magi were besieged with the same energy, but



not with so much impertinence, as had been bestowed on the obstinate scribes.

The Men of the East were more willing to satisfy the feverish curiosity. They related in detail the appearance of the wonderful Star, and its disappearance over the boundary of the ancient heritage of Israel, the kingdom of Solomon; "that fact," they suggested at their own risk, "seems to indicate, that your ancient Kingdom shall be restored to you by the new King of the Jews, even to the boundaries of Egypt, unto Segor and the Nahal Mizraim,<sup>1</sup> and unto Padan-Aram.<sup>2</sup> Our heavenly conductor vanished, when we set foot on the bounds of His domain." Also some of the adventures and difficulties of the journey were rehearsed, whereby the outspoken Persians did not hesitate to pay curt tribute to the fervor of the Jews of the east and the north, "who," they said, "have not even heard of the appearance of the Savior in their midst!"

When the three sages returned at noon, the idlers of Jerusalem had learnt more from the strangers, than from their own teachers.

Their boisterousness knew no more bounds; and when Caspar announced that they had been

<sup>1</sup> Wady el Arish.

<sup>2</sup> Mesopotamia.

bidden by the king himself to inquire diligently after the Child, and having found Him, to return, and to tell him, that he, too, might adore Him, so frequent and hearty a *Hosanna* rent the air, that the scribes hastened to the scene, and vociferously called down the wrath of Heaven upon the heads of the rejoicing masses. "Have ye gone mad, ye thieves and associates of thieves," they upbraided them with uplifted hands, "that ye will deliver up the Nation to perdition! Know ye not, that the king is sick unto death, and may change his mind at any moment? Peace, peace!"— The people knew the deep scribes too well, not to detect the menacing truth under the euphemism of "the king's danger." What would it have troubled the scribes, if Herod had died! But they instantly realized the folly of their treasonable demonstration of joy at the hope of delivery from the bondage of Rome and of Rome's tool on their throne.

Therefore, when the pilgrims departed, not one of the zealous shouters of their mighty *Hosanna* offered to accompany them the short way to Bethlehem, and to lay down with them a tribute of welcome and homage at the cradle of their Savior. "In the name of God, then," said Caspar, wondering at their fickleness, and

pitying their abject dread of a mortal king, and the slavish subjection to their leaders, and signaled to the Ethiopians, who had placed themselves at the head of the cheerful caravan, to lead the way.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WORLDLY-WISE

The undertaking of Caspar and Balthassar had soon ceased to command the interest and admiration both of the royal court and of the people of their own country. No sooner had the star vanished from the sky, never to return, and the enthusiastic caravan left the capital, than the great event was reduced to the level of an extraordinary, indeed, but natural, phenomenon. The diligence of both the sages was ascribed to the rashness and inconsideration of superstitiously enfeebled minds. The ancient religious traditions of the Persians and the Hindus had long since been disturbed and disjoined by the fanatical supporters and advocates of Brahmanism and Buddhism in succession. As late as only two centuries before, Buddhism, the cruder and more democratic form of reformation, returning from China, whither it had been banished by the rebellious Brahmins of India, had corrupted the old faith almost in every part of the land, and had lent a willing hand to the rein-

troduction of the most unworthy forms of idolatrous and sensual worship.

There was left, it is true, one feature of the hereditary sobriety of the Indo-germanic character, the respect for womanhood, and in consequence, for the conjugal ties; but the persistent and bold temptation of licentious ceremonies performed in the southern province at first in the innermost sanctuary of the temples, gradually and irrepressibly stamped the mark of its foul finger on the social relations of the unwary public. The people were still conscious of the superior beauty and purity of their ancient religion, and capable of sporadic efforts at re-establishing it in the place of honor; an allusion to the approaching redemption of the race by the incarnation of a son of the gods re-echoed in their hearts with the old, familiar gladness of their still customary religious hymns and epics. But the great ones wore alternately the holy cords of Mithra or of Brahma and the sash of Buddha, according as this form or that gained the ascendancy. Hence the courageous directions of the priests began to fail. The people, however, lacked the leisure, and the means as well, to search out for themselves the old truths from the rubbish heap of both Brahmanistic and Buddhistic errors and misrepresentations, and hence were

unconsciously drifting into the ways of those whom they were led to consider their betters.

Therefore, it was not difficult for the leaders to dissipate the fervor of the populace by means of insinuations of superstition and headlong haste in the undertaking of a few "old fools." The departure of the royal heir had also been viewed with open disfavor, and had been detailed to the people with bad grace.

Had he not had the excuse of following up his prospective bride, his title to the throne, as uncertain as the popular favor and as ineffectual as his father's desire, upon both of which it rested, would have been as irretrievably destroyed, as the reputation of Caspar and his Chaldean friend and companion. But as it was, Nizra was the future queen, chosen by both prince and people, and *her husband* would succeed to the throne. She was to her people the fair embodiment of the spirit of the Parsa, the pure offspring of one of the oldest select families, and distinguished no less for her virtue and her purity of blood, than for her external grace and beauty. The inhabitants of the capital were so much fascinated by her charming presence, that they never thought of reproaching her with the same infidelity to the national form and faith of the Divine, that they accounted unto her father as a crime akin to

high treason.—How blind the world can be! Or does the natural sense of the human heart, liberated from the trammels of egotism and jealous littleness, in a moment of unalloyed admiration of the true and good, obtain the true perspective of human destiny?

How the world would be changed into a paradise, if the minds of all could be disciplined to the habits of charity!

This change of attitude on the part of the public boded no good for the reception of Caspar on his return. His daughter could be taken from him at the command of the priests and nobles to be wedded to the candidate for royal honors. His protest against such summary proceedings would be answered with an accusation of impiety, and thus the ends of justice would be accomplished in both cases. They would, however, spare him the disgrace of public prosecution, and Nizra, the pain of her father's death, if both Caspar and Nizra would gracefully accede to the wish of the king.

Marut must have known of this universal sentiment in his favor, when he left his home to follow the Magi to the land of the Jews, and when he pressed his suit with so much indelicacy and such ruthless persistence at the inn of the Moriah. The assurance of it must have taken possession of his head to the degree of

dizzy pride, so that he neglected to inquire after that interest which Nizra had at that time most at heart, the quest of the Savior. He was so confident of instant victory, that he had at the outset mistaken his opponent for his captive; but he had been utterly defeated without even the opportunity of a second attack. His defeat had not sobered, but infuriated and distracted him, and he had added to his folly the crime of desecrating his manhood.

When he recovered from the effects of his first debauch after a two-days' agony, his inquiries after Nizra were met with the disheartening information that both Nizra and all the company from the East had indeed paid a visit to the southern hamlet of Bethlehem, but had not returned to Jerusalem, as Herod had bidden them return; they had disappeared in the same night, and with them also probably the object of their visit, the Holy Child and His mother. "For," the people said to him with a smile of satisfaction, "the Bethlehemites have since yesterday cast off the air of secrecy and concern, and have broken out in unmistakable rejoicing over his safety."

Marut's companions confirmed the assertions of the visitors at the inn; they had ridden down to Bethlehem the day before, and had found the town in a state of regretful joy and excitement.



“Come now what may,” the townsfolk had boasted, “as long as He and His mother are safe!”

Under these circumstances it was useless to go to Bethlehem, or to follow the fugitive Wisemen. The reason for their secret and stealthy departure was apparent. If the Child had not also been removed, Marut would have been inclined to attribute the haste and hurry of his countrymen to an effort to conceal their tracks from him, and to throw him off the scent. But with the unexplained removal of the child, the disappearance of the Magi assumed the aspect of flight from the persecutions of Herod.

Neither at Bethlehem nor at Jerusalem did any one seem willing to recollect whither the visitors and the Savior had taken their course. It was probable that they had all departed together in the same direction; but it was not probable, that the departure of so long a train of men and beasts in the dead of night had not been noticed. Yet the Bethlehemites staunchly maintained that they knew nothing.

Marut, therefore, resolved to return home by way of Jericho, the flower-garden of the Jordan, where on his way hither he had taken a quick view of the manner of life in vogue among the wealthy and effeminate residents. In case of trouble arising on account of the snubbing

administered to Herod by his countrymen, he would also be safer at Jericho than at Jerusalem, at least in so far as he was nearer the borders of Herod's dominion. And if Herod resigned himself to the insult of the strangers without seeking to avenge it, Jericho was at all hands a more suitable place of recreation than the disturbed and uncomfortable old City.

But before he put his resolution in effect, word had been received that the mother of the mysterious child had been seen after the Magi's departure. This report was confirmed on all sides upon cautious inquiry. "What now?" Marut questioned his companions.

"Leave both Bethlehem and Jerusalem," they replied; "we are known as the van-guard of the Magi; and, who knows, we may be mistaken also for their rear-guard. Away, before Herod takes a guess at our business in his capital! And indeed not to Jericho, where we would be recognized at once, but down towards the sea, on the great highway of the Phœnicians."

Accordingly they mounted in the middle of the day, and rode away through the gate of Hebron towards the southwest on the road of Cadytis and Gaza, which led into Egypt. But no farther out than Gabatha, probably two and a half hours' ride from Jerusalem, they over-

took their old acquaintance from Jericho, Rufus, the legionary. He was stripped of his military glory, was clad in the garb of a merchant, and was riding a most disreputably energetic mule, which was incessantly whisking its tail, and shaking its ears with every step. They would not again have known Rufus but for his cordial greeting, and the indisputable proof of his identity, his flaming red hair.

After mutual assurances of astonishment, their conversation immediately turned to the sole topic of general interest, the flight of the Eastern princes and of the Child of Bethlehem. But Rufus at once became reticent and circumspect in his answers; and as to questions, he never put another after the first: "Why are ye not in the company of your brethren?" They informed him that "they were not so gullible and so full of superstition as to place any faith whatsoever in the exalted mission of this newborn Jewish prince, whom his God had to conceal from the vengeance of a Herod." This profession of prejudice on the part of men who had not taken the trouble to verify the reasons for their disrespect, was too repulsive to a man of discipline and honor, to merit even as little recognition as a rebuke. Rufus withdrew his interest, and the animation with which Marut had begun and so far led the inquiry into the

ex-soldier's opinion on the events transpiring in Jerusalem, dwindled away into frigid silence. A long while, nothing seemed to attract attention but the weather, to the inscrutable whims of which Rufus was the first to pay his sardonic compliments.

"If all the gods of Rome are as much given to frivolity in their several dispensations," he said, "as the rain-god *Jupiter Pluvius*, there must be no end of amusement on the top of Olympus. Pity it is that I cannot ride my giddy mule heavenward! They need something up in the clouds to make them keep an eye on their business."

If Rufus had ever had respect for the gods of Rome, he had surely doffed it with his armor. His eyes twinkled again, and his wilful mule, as if conscious of the compliment bestowed upon its agility, again frisked and cavorted after the manner of its more nobly bred kin, but ever and anon completely destroyed the impression of gentler breeding by the constantly pendulous motion of its caudal wisp, and the nervous, wicked pricking and shaking of its long ears.

The hilarity of Rufus encouraged Marut once more to open the examination. "Whither art bound, friend?" he asked in a most friendly tone. Rufus was amused at the persistence and artlessness of the youth. "Oh, I?" he replied

pleasantly; "I am going into the desert to become an anchorite, that I may do penance for my sixteen years of military service. 'Tis hard, knowest well, to lead a pious life and to fight the livelong day. I am going to fight the devil for ten years; and if he is not harder to subdue than the Jews, I shall crown myself with myrtle and forget-me-nots, and hie me home to take a wife; I fear me, a man who is not wholly subdued, acts a poor partner to a good woman; and I want a good one to scratch my head when it catches fire! *Mehercule!*—Nay, I have sworn not to use the name of the heathen god again for a mouthful of relief—*me!*—" But his mule balked at that moment, and stopped so suddenly, that Rufus was pitched to the ground. "Here I am," he exclaimed, "and here I shall rest!" He drew a small loaf of bread from his bosom, a piece of meat as large as his two fists together, and a stiff and tense leather pouch. He gave his first attentions to the pouch, loosening its string at the head and extracting a stopper of cloth, moist with the contents. Rufus applied the stopper rather daintily to his nose, and then raised his eyes with a sly wink to his companions: "Good as nectar," he assured them, "sweet, strong, fragrant, and as delicate as the blushing maid of my first wooing!"

But Marut turned aside, his hair creeping

with horror of the "sweet and fragrant" reminiscences of his late conflict with the grinning demons of the cup.

The wayward mule set to grazing and browsing along the roadside, and Rufus settled down to a comfortable reparation of his injured self. Marut, who would not neglect so cheerful and experienced a companion, at last also dismounted with his attendants, and followed Rufus's example of good sense.

During the meal, Rufus inquired after Nizra. If Marut had carefully observed the face of his tempter, he could have seen the merry twinkle in his eyes, which betrayed the anticipation of the answer. "Nizra is with her father," Marut rejoined with a frown; "how knowest her?"

"I met her at Jericho, and told her sire of thy visit to Jerusalem."

"What did she say of me?"

"Of thee? Nothing! Thinkest I would remind *her* of thy presence? Nay, sir! I wanted to impress her with my own good qualities, sir;—but she has jilted me! And now I am shorn of all my splendor, and wrapped in a linen bag, and covered with a woolen sack, a very duffer! Oh, the sight of me!"

"Has Caspar said anything of me?"

"Caspar? Ay, Caspar asked me whence thou camest, whether thou wert young, and what

might be thy name. And he told me that thou art the son of his king, and, and—" Rufus stopped.

"And—and the—? Say it, Rufus, say it! And the—?"

"Nothing else; but I know it: the suitor of Nizra!"

"Did he not say this himself?"

"Nay, sir; but he asked me, what thou mightst have desired."

"And he knew, who I was!"

"Certainly, certainly, sir prince! A prudent father does not carry his marriageable daughter about the world on the tip of his tongue. He surely adores his fair child; but he is not her slave!"

"O ye heavens above!" exclaimed Marut mournfully; "to ask what I desired!"

"I saw Nizra at Bethlehem," Rufus continued, at first with the air of an infatuated simpleton, in order to give his unexpected confession a less suspicious countenance, but with growing animation as he proceeded: "She is truly a queen! How demurely she pressed that sweet child to her bosom! How she caressed him with the tenderness of a mother and the devotion of an angel! I would never again look into the face of another woman, if the mother of that child were not also a woman! *Me—! Ah,*

to Hades with Hercules and all his tribe! Wilt know it, Marut?" he broke forth with unrestrained pathos: "I do believe, that Child is the Son of God, and His mother is the Virgin of the Jewish books, and He is come to be our king, and He is going to teach us something that will make our ears tingle!— Now it is out! I could not keep it longer! Laugh at me, if ye will, ye heathen! But I swear it: He is the Son of God! *Me—!*" He slapped his lips vigorously for the repeated lapse of invoking the idol of the Romans, sprang to his feet, surprised his mule in the midst of its feast, mounted, and vanished in the twilight.

"A barbarian!" Marut contemptuously commented on the explosion of Rufus's feelings; then he also had his beast made ready, and the solemn trio followed in the tracks of the energetic mule on the road of Gaza.



## CHAPTER VII

### GREETING THE KING

Rufus had acquired the remarkable precision with which he finished his argument with Marut, during the last two days. Bethlehem had been pointed out to the Magi as lying directly south of the city, at a distance of about six leagues. With their fine beasts, refreshed from the morning's rest, and sharing the eagerness and gladness of their riders, which could no longer be repressed even by the dread shadows of uneasiness hovering over Jerusalem, they would reach Bethlehem in half an hour. It was a bright, cheery noon, the hours of greatest comfort in the open at that season. The southern gate which was to release them from the confinement and gloom of the unfriendly city hove in sight in a few minutes, grim of aspect for its strength and purpose, but to them not without a tinge of geniality for the readiness with which it spread wide its huge wings at their approach. The soft, almost inaudible tread of the camels and the dromedaries scudded past—and once more they were free!

Nizra was now riding at the head; they had scarcely left the cheerless city, when she uttered a cry of incontinent joy, and pointed with both hands towards the heavens, where their former mysterious guide stood twinkling and beckoning with fresh luster and life. On the instant of its discovery it was seen to move ahead towards Bethlehem, where it arrived before them, and stood still above an humble house at the outskirts of the village. Its silvery beams turned away the sun's rays, and broke them about itself in an iris of many brilliant colors, as it descended slowly, majestically, into the region of the lower air, radiating its fascinating glow, a wreath of splendor and glory, cast down from the invisible realms of Light Eternal.

They hailed it with one concerted cry of thrilling delight, and bared their heads in reverence of its sacred mission. Were they not to behold, to salute, to adore, in a few brief minutes, *the Son of God*? Had not the king himself, instructed by the hierophants of Israel, assured them that Bethlehem was the birthplace of the Savior, selected by God, and pointed out by the finger of the holy prophets? Their hearts leaped for joy, and quaked for the awe of the sacred hour.

They were surprised, as they hastened along

their way, to see in the depressions and hollows of the fields anemones and poppies in scarlet bloom, and the almond and peach trees putting on their spring-time beauty. The spring of the lower Jordan valley seemed to have already sent its scouts ahead in the sheltered nooks and windings of the fields and meadows, and to have posted here and there among the numerous beds of fresh sprouting green its smiling sentinels in preparation of its own cheerful entry. About the well<sup>1</sup> which they passed on the road, a short distance from the walls, dense clusters of the "willows of the brook,"<sup>2</sup> were busily putting forth their buds, ready to burst into a banner of crimson bloom; at the "Tomb of Rachel," an abundance of the swelling rosy-tinted buds of the ranunculus were expectantly nodding to the soft whisper of the fondling breeze; and right and left, the orange tree held up its diligence in its hardy, half-ripe fruits, for their admiration. How readily the mute kingdom responded to the early invitation of spring, to arise and vest itself with the garments of gladness!

At the tomb of Rachel, they were taken aback as at an apparition. They found Rufus sunning himself, lying prone on the ground, with

<sup>1</sup> Later called the "Well of the Virgin."

<sup>2</sup> The Oleander.

the end of a long rope, attached to the halter of his mule, wound about his wrist. He sprang up, as they approached his station of rest, pulled the unwilling mule towards himself, and mounted. "If thou and thy company deem it not bad taste to offer your greeting to the Savior with my insignificant personality in your train," he said to Caspar, half apologetically, half humorously, "I will complete my conversion, and offer my services to a *real* king. I have taken my discharge from the legion, and am now under no obligations to any one, but to the new God, the same as ye. Am I welcome?"

"Thou art welcome, Rufus, thrice welcome!" Caspar replied, and would probably have embraced Rufus, if the attempt had not been too dangerous to make from the height of the dromedary. He opened his arms, at all events; Rufus also stretched forth his arms from the back of his humble drudging beast, and fell in line with the solemn procession.

The Magi were unwilling, or, perhaps, unable to give vent to the fullness of their hearts by mere words; they murmured and mumbled exclamations of awe and wonder, scarcely taking their eyes from the Star, and from the house, over which it stood on guard. But Rufus, although no less struck with the brilliant beauty of

Heaven's messenger, and probably also very anxious, and very much distracted at the prospect of meeting with the sweetest and most sacred mystery of his life, still lacked the mental discipline of these Oriental sages. He accosted first one, and then another, with negative success of his attempt at an exchange of enthusiasm; he turned to the attendants, with equal failure. Then he cheered up his despondent mule, and pressed to the side of Nizra. "If that girl," he grumbled, "also turns me away, I shall burst, or jump, or stand on my head on the saw-end of my dear *mula pertinax*,<sup>1</sup> and call upon Apollo to endow her with the gift of speech!—Nizra, Lady mine! Good, dear, sweet Nizra!" he cried as soon as he reached Nizra's side. But she wonderingly turned her head towards him and surveyed him with dumb astonishment. He had spoken in Latin, with the cant of the soldiers, which sounded to her rather like the rattle and clatter of the wooden wheels of an old watermill, than like human speech, because she understood nothing of it, and Rufus delivered himself so rapidly of his accumulated resentment that he simply shouted, without any effort at precision, breath or pause.

"Nay?" he continued after a moment of waiting; "art even as dumb as the rest? Knowest

<sup>1</sup> Obstinate Mule.

not that I must find a sympathetic soul, or chew my tongue clean off its hinges?"

But noticing the kindness of her eyes, he bethought himself, laughed, and repeated all he had said, in Aramaic, the prevailing dialect of Syria and Palestine.

"But the hour is so sacred," she replied, "and the anxiety of our hearts forbids its profanation. Think of it, Rufus! We are about to set our unholy eyes upon the Son of God!"

"Ay, Lady fair; but He is come in the form of a child, to be loved and caressed, not, to be worshiped with fear and trembling. I—I am not afraid," he went on, stammering a little and thus belying his own show of courage, "I—am only a little oppressed. *Me*—! If I could only find a comfortable word to swear with!" he inserted in Latin; "my Lady, I think this is the happiest, merriest ride that I have ever undertaken! No drums and trumpets, but a hundred breasts full of thumping, throbbing, sobbing hearts, and a hundred faces full of the sunshine of the joy of children, and—and of the courage of children, too—my Lady!" he sputtered at last, with a vain attempt at encouraging himself, and of throwing off the unwonted sense of anxiety.

"Oh, Rufus," Nizra warned him, "how

wouldst speak so lightly of the favor of Heaven ! Thy heart should sit on thy lips and keep silent watch over thy meditations.”

“My heart is in my boots, Lady sweet, and my tongue is as itchy as my mule ! I am all distracted ! Just look at that wonderful Star ! A little rainbow ; only going around all the way, the prettiest frame for the finest picture on earth ! By— ! If the Child is as lovely as His herald, I shall die at His feet, or at least go mad for six months ! *Me— !* I wish almost, it were over !”

Nizra did not respond to this gush of feeling, and Rufus himself appeared to become more nervous at every pace towards the hallowed spot, where the Savior had made his dwelling place.

From the time that Rufus held his peace, solemn silence prevailed. The dreadful moment, which would bring them face to face with the Savior, as the shepherds had called Him in the hearing of the priests of Jerusalem, was drawing so near, that they held their breath from expectation of the heavenly vision. Even the Ethiopians, the most sober of the troop, began again to loosen their headgear, threw back their long, loose sleeves, and became fidgety and uneasy. Their appearance, after they had removed the varicolored cloths from

their heads, was truly a revelation. Melchior, their leader, wore a diadem of gold, studded with stones that glowed with the colors of the rainbow, and earrings of inestimable value. His companions were arrayed in gold and silver bespangled jackets, and wore about their necks golden chains, most artistically wrought in alternating shields and rings. Caspar and Balthassar were not so gorgeously decked out, but the priestly tiaras with their silken and silver cords and tassels made no mean adornment for their older and more venerable heads.

Nizra removed the outer covering of her head, retaining only the veil over her hair. Rufus looked at her curiously, and also began to fumble at his own simple covering, which consisted of a piece of red and yellow striped linen, wound about the head, with the ends in the neck. But as he remembered that his hair was out of color, he desisted, discouraged and peevish. "He may think I do not love Him as much as thou," he remarked to Nizra; "but I shall prove my devotion. I have a pouch of sesterces in my bosom, which I will offer him as a pledge of my fealty."

"If the heavens are His, and the earth," Nizra replied, smiling indulgently, "He hath no need of Cæsar's sesterces."

"Ay, my Lady fair: but He is as poor as a



mouse, they have told me. His mother made the offering of the poor when she presented Him at the altar as her firstborn. The Jews have not forgotten it. A lamb is a much more sightly gift than a pair of doves. He is a stranger here, mayest know; if the weather were less severe, we should forego the joy of seeing Him. But He is too small and frail to be taken home to Nazareth, whence His mother hails. It is an ill wind that blows nobody good!"

Nizra's face fell; but not with the unkind expression of annoyance or disappointment; a deep flush of confusion mounted her cheeks. "Thanks to thee, Rufus," she said softly, "that thou hast reminded me of His humbleness!" Then she sank into a mood of deep reflection.

Rufus chid himself for having been so explicit in his remarks; "these girls," he mused, "are as sensitive as an eye, and as deep as an ocean. Say a word that does not feel as soft as a lamb's head, and they close up, and leave thee out in the cold world alone to reconsider thy foolish zeal. What will I ever do with one of them, when I shall have to take one home to my hearth! *Me—!—Well!* If everyone were a Nizra, I would drown myself before I would marry one of them! They could not be touched with a Roman lance! *O dominula mea Perti-*

*nax!*"<sup>1</sup> he exclaimed with a roar that made Nizra shudder, but added in a gentler tone, addressing himself to his mule: "Let good enough alone: thou art noble enough mate for me, *mula mea*, until thou canst bear me no more. Thou art not so trim as my charger was, but thou art a good deal more lively, by—let us say, by Jove!—Nizra, Lady mine!" he cried at the maiden: "If thy father do not cast me off, I shall go to the East with thee. I am too young to go home and lie idle, and too angry at the Jews to serve another *conscriptio* <sup>2</sup> in Syria; are all the maids of thy country as fine as thou?"

"Get thee behind me!" Nizra fretted with manifest vexation.

Rufus fell back, again wondering in what particular he had offended the delicate maiden.

The crude antics of the barbarian had not served the devotion and meditation of the elated pilgrims; yet it had been, if not a welcome, at least a tolerable, diversion from the oppressive anxiety which weighed on them the more heavily as they neared the gate of the house, over which their Star was hovering, because the humble exterior of the dwelling bore so little resemblance to the royal palace of their first

<sup>1</sup> "O my Miss Stubborn!"

<sup>2</sup> Term of enlistment.

conception of the Savior's abode. A new disappointment in the shape of a mistake of direction or location was impossible. Here was Bethlehem, here was a human habitation, here was *their* Star in all its original glory, as it had occupied the heavenly vault in the far East; here, then, must also be the *King of the Jews!*

At their approach, the village became alive with joyful curiosity. From the doors of the houses, from the narrow streets, from the adjoining gardens and fields, from everywhere, men, women and children came forth, wonderingly rubbing their eyes, uplifting their hands, pulling their carelessly worn garments together, the men removing their coarse hats, the women gathering the ends of their headcloths under the throat, and the little boys and girls wrapping their hands in their simple coats with sheer awe and embarrassment at the novel, splendid spectacle. So many magnificently caparisoned strange beasts, so many strange men, some of much lighter complexion than they themselves, some as black as jet, and that beautiful maiden, who was in no way arrayed after the manner of the Jewish costume; a hundred and twenty men, and a hundred and forty beasts, by actual counting of the boys; nay, this was a sight worth seeing! They

also had seen the Star descending over the house which they knew to be blest with the presence of *their own* little Savior and His blessed Mother. And now these men entering the house, with golden vessels on their arms: a square box on the arm of one,—the black one,—a vessel of the shape of a decapitated amphora with a golden knob on its cover, on the arm of another, and a large flask of alabaster, encased with silver and encrusted with precious stones, on the arm of the third! What they may contain! Such wealth in Bethlehem! Oh, it was wonderful! But the lovely Child of Heaven was worthy of it all, and of much more! They had occasionally made their own little offerings of a lamb, of bread, of fruit, of doves, to His Mother, and she had received them with such graceful gratitude! If they could only go in, and see!

But there was no room to-day. Most of the pilgrims immediately set to work erecting their tents, and pitching camp. After a while some of the natives offered to lend their aid. It was gratefully accepted, and in half an hour the little village of tents was completed, “covering an area,” one of the curious Bethlehemites remarked facetiously, “nearly as large as their own blessed little town.”

As soon as the excited villagers heard that

some of the wonderful strangers could speak the language of the land, there began an endless series of questions about their homes, the Star, their faith, their wives and children who had been left behind, and last of all about the one only mule, which was seen feasting on the tender grass a good distance back of the tented field, swishing its tail with the unconcern of an imperial war-horse. But Rufus was among those who had entered the house, at the side of Nizra, and there were wags among the servants of the Wisemen. "That mule?" one answered the idle inquiry, "that mule is the mount of the devil. Have ye observed the red-headed rider?" And when some nodded affirmatively, their dark eyes starting from their heads with horror, he added: "He has burnt his hair at the fire of hell."

But his wit had instantly prepared an embarrassment for him. "And those *black men*," one questioned with awe-struck voice, "are they also from the place of terror and torment?"

Now, a handful of those "black men" were standing near, and showed by their amused smiles, that they had understood the meaning of the tilt. Moreover, Melchior, their chief, was among the favored first visitors of the Savior; hence it was impossible to wave the curious questioner aside, or to attempt satisfying

him with a jocose reply. The Ethiopians also made no essay to come to the assistance of the joker; they seemed even to relish his discomfiture, and the shrewdness of the Bethlehemites. "Ask them yourselves!" the wit blurted out at last; "I am afraid of them." And he ran away, among the camels, some of the boys and girls laughing at him as at a trapped prevaricator.

At that juncture, Rufus came out of the house in the company of Caspar and a few others, and waved his arms at the expectant servants, to come and pay their respects to the Holy Child. His face was flushed, but his gesticulation, although nervous and quick, was decidedly under the control of his reverence. "Go ahead," he excitedly whispered to those who passed him; "the greatest surprise of your lives! Just wait and see!"

The children put their heads together and slyly pointed their fingers at his flaming hair. He had ultimately removed his head-cloth, and was carrying it dangling from his hand. "As long as this Star shall shine over me," he ejaculated, when he noticed the attention which he received from the children, "so long shall I go about with bare head. *Me—!* I would like to remove my shoes, too—if the ground were dry and warm.—Go away, little lambs," he said

to the children, who thronged about him evidently oblivious of the assurance that he had come from "the place of terror and torment"; "I will seek a quiet corner to taste it over—and my stubborn old mule, to teach her how to behave in the presence of God!"

He spoke so earnestly, that the children readily permitted him to pass on. But he walked through the tented alley, to the end of it, and there sat down under a large olive, gesticulating, striking his breast and weeping in a confusion of repentance and happiness, with his head-cloth still waving from his hand. His *mula pertinax* once or twice eyed him suspiciously, but being apparently satisfied that his condition was not alarming beyond his habitual capriciousness, continued grazing quietly and whisking its outrageously unsightly tail.

In the course of the afternoon an occasion to visit the blessed house had been offered to all the members of the caravan. Caspar had inspected the camp, and had given a few directions as to the care and stabling of the beasts for the night, and then had returned to the cradle of the Savior. Nizra had never again left the house after her first entry. She sat at the feet of the Mother, and asked many curious questions concerning the Messiah, the Son of God, and listened with ever-increasing rev-

erence and devotion to the simple expositions of the prophetic outline of His life and mission from the lips of the hallowed maiden, who had borne the King of the Jews. But Nizra became quite uneasy, when the Mother related the incidents of his presentation in the Temple, repeating in substance the terrible prophecy of Simeon: "This one is set up as a *sign* which shall be contradicted, and thine own soul a sword shall pierce." "Is not that glorious Star the sign of His reign," Nizra inquired anxiously, "of a reign of might and splendor?"

"Hast noticed, child," the mother replied, "that the sign in the middle of the Star is the sign of the *Thau* (T)? It is either a sword or a cross. He is come to bring peace upon the earth to those who shall receive Him; but the sword upon those who shall reject Him."

"And upon Himself?"

"The ingratitude of His people."

"As is already apparent!" Nizra gravely supplemented the motherly complaint.

But she was ill at ease over the mysterious nucleus of the Star. She arose, went to a window, and attentively observed the sign. "O God," she exclaimed, raising and folding her hands, "in truth, the Star bears a cross in its center!"

Should she reveal the prophecy made at her



birth: "The Star of the East shall be thy sign"? In the presence of the angelic beauty of that Heavenly Child, she felt too bashful to recount the promise, that she should be the sister of the king; for that Child undoubtedly was *the King*; but of the "Symbol of the Fathers," she would make bold to ask an interpretation.

"Mother," she addressed herself thoughtfully to Mary, "what is the Symbol of the Fathers?"

"The *Tree* of Moses, the *Thau* of Ezechiel, the *Rule* of Noah,"<sup>1</sup> Mary replied, a little surprised at the mysterious question out of the mouth of the pagan maiden; "the Sign of Salvation, which shall be contradicted."

"A sword, then, or a cross!" Nizra murmured; "it shall be my reward," she added, looking up wistfully, and with paling face into the loving eyes of the Mother.

"It shall be mine no less," Mary encouraged her; "but He Himself shall bless it; and, child," she said haltingly and in a low voice, "I fear me,—by His blood!"

Nizra was on the point of fainting away. What a crying contrast between the honors of

<sup>1</sup> The ancient traditions of the Hindus and the Persians describe the scepter or Rule of Noah, and of Jima, their deified ancestor, as having had the shape of T.

the King's sister and the Prince's bride of her youthful, fanciful dream, and the terrible vision of the bloody wooing of the Savior as it was foretold in sacred song and legend, and prefigured in the sacred emblems of the fathers!

Nizra begged permission to take the Child into her arms, and as soon as His Mother consented, she lifted Him up from the splendidly and comfortably dressed cot, which she herself had made up with her gifts of costly silken and linen cloths and garments, and pressed Him in a transport of unspeakable bliss and tenderness to her bosom. "I will be Thine," she fondly whispered to Him; "be Thou mine—forever!" Then she impressed a fervent kiss upon His lips, and laid Him into the arms of His Mother. "God guide thee," Mary said, as Nizra turned towards the door, with her face twitching from conflicting emotions, and her eyes brimful of hot, glittering tears. "And thee also," she returned the blessing, sobbing without an effort at restraint, "thou blessed Queen, the first victim on the altar of the High-priest of the God of Heaven!"<sup>1</sup>

Nizra was the last to leave the house in the

<sup>1</sup> To one acquainted with the ancient traditions of the Eranians, these sentiments were not as strange as they may appear in the twentieth century.

evening. Rufus had inquired after her in every tent. He was leading his mule by the halter, dejected, and yet not sad, a curiously fit companion to the cunning, alert beast, which incessantly played its ears with feigned disinterestedness. At last, finding his search unsuccessful, he stationed himself at the gate, and waited for Nizra to come out. He would not enter again; "I do not want to make a ninny of myself," he grumbled, "and I could not contain my joy and my foolishness at any rate. So, here I remain, and stand on guard at the tent of my new General."

When Nizra appeared with all the traces of her internal commotion upon her face, he hesitated at first to accost her. But she relieved him of his doubt. "Rufus," she said very soberly and earnestly, "Hast bid the Savior good-bye? On the morrow we shall return to the City, and thence to our own land. Go now, and acquit thee of thy duty!"

"I cannot, Lady mine, and I will not!" he replied stoutly; "I shall never bid my God good-bye; I shall need His help too often—*Me*—!—Bless my lips!" And he blubbered about "a ninny at all events," and turned his head towards his mule, which affectionately put out its tongue and licked his face—but only once; for Rufus entered a tangible protest against such

uncouth familiarity, before the caress was repeated.

Nizra suspected that the rough-cast barbarian had also looked deep into the mystery of this Child's appearance, and curious to compare her own experience with that of so untutored a mind, as that of the Roman soldier seemed to be, she stepped nearer, and asked him confidentially: "Rufus, what manner of king shall *He* make for the Jews?" "What manner of king?" he answered with intense astonishment; "just such king as they deserve! A scape-goat for their infidelity, a stumbling block for their pride, a mock-king for their restless ambition! Hast seen the cross in the heart of the Star? Look, there, now! It is turning red!" he exclaimed.

Nizra turned her head and saw that at the same instant the center of the mystic Star was changing to purple, and then to a bright, warm crimson. Its shape was no more to be mistaken; the iris about it had faded away; slowly also the *coma*<sup>1</sup> vanished; and the little bright red cross stood out plainly marked against the somber sky of the night.

"We have an herb<sup>2</sup> in our hills," Rufus resumed, "of the shape of this cross, and the Druids have taught us, that it is a holy herb,

<sup>1</sup> The "envelope" (of a comet).

<sup>2</sup> The shamrock.

the ensign of the great god who is some time to descend, and to re-establish his reign among men; but men shall strike him with it, until he be dead. Yet he shall wear it as his escutcheon on his return to the clouds, whence his dominion shall proceed.—Nizra, Lady mine! I want to be there, when men shall strike Him!—So sweet a child, and so awful a fate awaiting Him!”<sup>1</sup>

Nizra had lost courage. The soldier had proved himself a very apt pupil in the school of her father and in that of the Mother of the Savior. She left Rufus, beckoning to him to follow her; but he protested: “Nay, Nizra fair; I must return to Jerusalem this night, to sound the sentiment of Herod and of the scribes; I put no faith in their interest. I may be of service to my God; and that is my duty as a soldier!”

Nizra went away, filled with respect for the tender solicitude of the blustering barbarian. But Rufus knelt down, and repeatedly pressed his lips on the threshold of the tent of his “general,” and then nimbly mounted his *Miss Pertinax*, and rode away towards the City.

<sup>1</sup> Compare also the ancient Scandinavian legends, according to which Baldur, the son of Odin and Frigga, is killed by his blind brother Hoedur with the stem of the mistletoe, at the instigation of Lokhi, the Evil one. The same idea underlies the “*Heel of Achilles*,” and the “*Shoulder of Siegfried*.” The mistletoe was the only plant overlooked in the conjuring of the gods, the *heel* was the only spot not rendered invulnerable, and the *shoulder*, the only place not anointed with the dragon’s blood.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DETAINED

Once that he was again inside the unfriendly walls of Jerusalem, Rufus set himself to his task in earnest. He had resolved to "feel the pulse" of the city, and to report to Caspar any signs of impending danger either to him and his party, or to the Child of Bethlehem. Rufus had many acquaintances among the military, and hence could easily pursue his observations into the palace of Herod. It was more difficult to obtain contact with the priests and the scribes. Their society was impenetrable to everything that savored of Rome. The most prominent leaders were indeed partisans of Herod, and might approve any scheme of violence proceeding from the court, so long as it did not lay new burdens on their own people; but the question of the birth of their Messiah was a purely domestic question, which they would, probably, not allow Herod to touch, if their counsel prevailed. The same national sensitiveness closed also the lips of the ordinary inhabitants against discussing their own affairs with the Gentiles. Still,

it might be possible to gain sufficient insight into the mind of the scribes and elders to warrant a conclusion as to their future position on the mysterious events of Bethlehem. If he could only find his old friend Shemaiah, the captain of the Temple guard, a fanatical Jew, forsooth, but withal of liberal views about the incumbency of Herod!

Shemaiah was in closest touch with every one who moved in the front ranks in the Temple or at the court. No undertaking of importance could escape his notice. He was a man of exceptional courage and frankness; more courageous and frank, in fact, than his superiors deemed desirable. The spark of revolt was forever kept glowing under the ashes of abject submission to the ruling powers, and an unguarded burst of national pride, such as Shemaiah was at any time likely to call forth by his impassioned invective against the violence of the Herodian military, might again fan it into flame, as the war-cry of Judas and Mathias had fanned it into a most violent explosion not many months before.<sup>1</sup> But Shemaiah's courage, if it served the security of the community less, upheld the independence of the national Sanctuary the more; hence Shemaiah was not only handled with exquisite

<sup>1</sup> Jewish Antiquities, XVII. 6, 2.

consideration by the patriotic leaders, but also was the idol of the people. The partisans of Herod had many a difference to settle with him; but they deferred their reckoning till a more auspicious day.

Shemaiah, therefore, standing between the intrigues of the courtiers and the jealousy of the priests and scribes, was best qualified to notice a change in either camp, and to inform Rufus of the effect of the Magi's visit on both king and priests. Him Rufus would try to approach. Rufus was not a Roman, and although he had borne the arms of Rome, still, now that he had laid them down, his offense was easily forgiven. He was only a barbarian at best who had been pressed into the service of Rome with the same informality that Rome was wont to employ in her proceedings against the Jews. There was bred a sort of fellowship between the oppressed Jew and the conquered barbarian.

Shemaiah would make his round of inspection through the citadel, the grim *Antonia*, and through the ramparts and barracks adjacent to the Temple, about midnight. After that he would be at leisure to receive an old friend at his headquarters in the fortress. But Rufus would have to present himself, before the captain returned to the *Antonia*, because its gates would then be closed for the night.



It was still early, at least three hours before midnight. The way to the Antonia would take about an hour from the southern gate. Hence Rufus rode into an inn, had his mule stabled and fed, and shuffled into the large, low hall or covered court, where wine and meat were served to hungry travelers and homeless strangers.

His entrance was scarcely noticed by the curious gathering of Arabs, Syrians, Samaritans, Romans and Greeks, refuse and wreckage from the several countries which had in their time contributed their mite to the burden of Israel. They were squatting on the loam floor, or reclining on dirty divans, on benches along the walls and on the low tables, in groups of from six to a dozen, amid the litter and leavings of their fare, and contentedly quaffing their bowl and telling their tale.

The common topic of their conversation was the event of the day, the visit of the Eastern princes, and the object of their quest, the mysterious Child of Bethlehem.

"The Jews have read it out of their own prophet," an Arab shouted at one of his incredulous companions, while Rufus was bartering with the hosteler for a pot of wine and a piece of mutton. "Thou must give me the bread to boot," Rufus insisted; "thy price is exorbitant!

I am no prince to pay thee ten sesterces for a supper!"

"But thou hast been with the princes!" the hosteler retorted; "canst afford to drop a penny or two of thy rich hire; no money, no bread; no bread, no wine; no wine, no meat! I do not steal my bread to throw it to every huckster that happens to have red hair and big paws. Get thee along, if thou art a miser!"

This was plain language, and Rufus stood aghast. "*Ecce, quem Hermes coarctavit!*"<sup>1</sup> he exploded, assuming the language of the Romans, in order to impress the rude tavern-keeper with the dignity of the Romans. But he had shot wide of the mark. "Hermes to sheol!" the irate hosteler countered; "none of thy Quirinal puppets<sup>2</sup> in this house!"

"Art a Jew?" Rufus exclaimed sarcastically.

"It is of no concern to thee what I may be!"

"But know thou, my lord stable keeper, that my business is to study men and manners of all climes. Thou shalt have the first place in my collection of curiosities, alongside the mummified carcass of an Egyptian washerwoman, topped with an owl for the symbol of thy geni-

<sup>1</sup> "Behold the man, whom Hermes has made tight!" (Mercury, the god of the Merchants).

<sup>2</sup> "Roman Gods," with a fling at Romulus, the founder of Rome, who was called "*Quirinalis*."

ality, and supported on the back of a hare for the sign of thy courage! Man of the Stable! If thou do not supply me with victuals on the instant, I shall be tempted to make my fare out of thy pumpkin of a head! Get thee about thy business! Mine is to eat and pay, and thine, to serve me, and to keep silent! Hast ears?"

The hosteler stood looking at the spouting giant, undecided whether to laugh at him, or to make an attempt at putting him out.

But the powerful chest and the wicked smile of Rufus readily assisted him in making up his mind on the easier proposition. That huge mass of muscle and bone was to all appearances more easily pacified than disposed of. "Squat!" the hosteler said tersely, pointing to a vacant cot. "Squat—ay!—Pot!" grunted Rufus, and added with feigned ferocity: "And let it be a big one!"

The clattering encounter had attracted the undivided attention of the inmates. One of them, the Arab, who had broken off his argument over the Jewish prophecies concerning the Messiah, arose and without ceremony seated himself at the side of Rufus. "Canst tell me," Rufus introduced himself, "who and what that old miser is?"

"It is *Shurek*, the Samaritan!"

“*Shurek? Ni fallor*,<sup>1</sup> this is one of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet?”

“Does he not look like a Hebrew, and talk like a Hebrew, and yet is not written<sup>2</sup> in their book of life? The Samaritans are excluded from the heritage of the Jews! His name is *Shem-bar-Sholom*;<sup>3</sup> but on account of his intractableness we have dubbed him *Shurek*. *Shem-bar-Sholom*!—His mother must have had humorous notions of peace!”

By this time another troop had entered and mixed with the curious guests. “*Shurek*” placed wine and meat at Rufus’s knees, and questioningly laid down a loaf of wheat bread. “I shall pay for it,” Rufus assured him impatiently, and struck him a blow on the grimy hand that still had hold of the bread. Then he divided his attention between the care of himself and the admiration of the speechless observers, whose appearance upon such close inspection might have inspired fear into any but the intrepid heart of the barbarian. Some of these faces bore as many scars as a butcher’s chopping block, and an air of mixed insecurity and impudence, not to be looked for outside a slave pit. Some also betrayed the unbending haugh-

<sup>1</sup> “Unless I be mistaken.”

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew vowels were not written.

<sup>3</sup> *Shem*, the Son of Peace.

tininess of the Zealots of the mountains; and others again were stamped with the cunning and selfishness of the Jewish publicans, who had sold their birthright as Children of Abraham for the profitable seat at Cæsar's toll-gate. A few might be laborers out of employment, or swineherds from Gadara; their exterior was repulsive rather from the filthiness and the ungrateful odor of their coarse dress than from any feature indicative of moral or mental wryness. Some, however, might be of the band of She-maiah's fighters, to judge from their reserve, sent to spy on the disreputable gathering. This tavern surely was as low a meeting-place for thugs and thieves as Rufus had ever heard of even in labyrinthic Rome.

"Hast been down to Bethlehem," the Arab at last interrupted Rufus's scrutiny of the single faces; "those Persian princes are wealthy men, eh?"

It was superfluous to answer this question in the affirmative; it was a foregone conclusion with these hawks, both that the Magi carried considerable money and jewelry, and that Rufus, their "guide," had been generously rewarded. But Rufus nevertheless retained the last bite in his mouth, and stared at the impudent fellow with speechless surprise. He had known indeed that the highways of Palestine

were under the supervision of the "Knights of the Road," but had not been aware that the headquarters of these agents of the bandits, who paraded as Zealots, were located in the lowest dives of Jerusalem. He had several times been dispatched into the mountains of Galilee and into the region of the Jericho highroad, to dislodge various bands of prowlers who made traveling unsafe, and, to some extent, crippled the trade of the small merchants; but as a soldier, he had never come in sight of a nestful of such impudence as his present company could flaunt. And they all seemed to be of the same stripe, probably more than forty men. "Hast crawled into a hole!" he said to himself, "now seek thee a safe escape."

It was plain that he could not ward them off single-handed, if they should conclude to rob and beat him. He still had half of his salary with him, snugly strapped in a heavy belt; he had offered it all to the Mother of the Savior, but had succeeded in inducing her with much persuasion to accept only half of it.—Had he known that Mary delivered the half, which she had accepted with the greatest reluctance, the scant hire of a soldier, into the hands of Nizra to return to him as soon as they should have departed! "If she had only accepted it all!" he fretted; "I am very loth to give up my money

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to thieves! Then I would turn my pockets inside out and stand on my head, and unstrap my empty belt, and strap somebody's ears with it! And most conveniently the ears of this dirty Arab here, who blows his garlic smell into my Romanized nose!"

Rufus's buoyant spirits could not sustain the narrowness of fear or apprehension. He had never seen anything that had not had a humorous side. Therefore, now, instead of resorting to trickery and subterfuge, he laughed at his questioner, and replied, rising to his feet and unsheathing an ugly knife, with the unconcern of a playful boy: "Why, certainly, Son of Ishmael! Those princes could not journey from the land of the Parsa, and from the land of Saba and Chus without supplying themselves abundantly with the *nervus rerum*.<sup>1</sup> But as to my reward for guiding them—my good little man—" here Rufus stretched his towering figure to its full height, and brandished his knife about the throat of the Arab who had also risen to his feet—"they trundled me and my mule along free of charge, and I was grateful for the favor. I have returned to the city to ask Shemaiah for a guard over their camp!" The last assertion he roared out with the lustiness

<sup>1</sup> The nerve of things (money).

and confidence of his erstwhile battle-cry, "*Patriam et Pennates!*"<sup>1</sup>

The name of the doughty captain of the Temple guard struck terror into the breasts of the outlaws. He had never given quarters in his encounters with their associates. He had dispatched every captured robber on the spot of the combat, and had his body, unless it was that of a Jew, hung up on a tree along the road as a warning to the rest. Shemaiah was the living terror of the Judean fraternity of thieves.

They scattered quickly, took up the various articles of clothing, which they had laid aside, and a few bags which they had probably carried as blinds, and began to go out, one by one, the latest arrivals, slowly and doubtingly; but now the inn-keeper made bold to take the part of his habitual guests. "Why do ye not kill him before he may inform Shemaiah?" he shouted; "ye cowards!"

The suggestion was worth considering. Some returned, threw aside their bags, and put their hands in their coats for their daggers. But Rufus threw back his cloak and his wide sleeves, and revealed to their disgusted sight the long leather coat, which protected his body from the neck to the knees, and which was im-

<sup>1</sup> "Our country and our homes!"



pervious both to the thrust of a knife, and to the blow of an ordinary sword. At the same time he squared up, and scornfully beckoned to them with a toss of his head. His knife he was holding with his teeth, thus presenting a most ferocious appearance.

They declined the invitation to tussle with this Samson, and absconded. But in the nick of time Rufus noticed that the hosteler was straining a bow at him, from behind a corner of a pile of chests. He turned, ducked, and sprang forward in an instant, snatched the bow from his assailant, broke it, and splintered its pieces, one after another, on the would-be-assassin's head, growling and spitting all the time. "And now," he said, when the hosteler fell to the floor and begged for mercy, "thou art paid both for the meat and for the scare thou hast given me!" Then he went out, and a little later cantered up the street with his skittish mule at quite a seemly gait, in the direction of the Temple.

When he reached a narrow cross street which led down to a low port in the wall and was continued as a sheep path on the other side of the Kidron, he met a small troop of guards leading and driving a number of fine horses. They stopped him and questioned him about the purpose of his nightly journey. Rufus again tried

the charm of Shemaiah's name; but they peremptorily ordered him to accompany them to the headquarters of the Temple guard. And to dispel all doubt of their being in earnest, they forthwith threw a halter over the head of his mule, and pulled him along. "Miss Pertinax" objected in her own energetic way, but to no purpose. They pulled Rufus off over her head, and let her stand puzzled on the spot. Then she changed her mind and followed her master, who had not stirred a finger to protest against such violence, nor uttered another word after he had informed them that he was on the way to headquarters himself.

The men spoke little; the streets were dark and deserted. The patter and clatter of the hoofs on the rough pavement, and the clanking of the armor of the guards, sounded so strange that they seemed to re-echo from another world.

Their way wound upwards, higher and higher, past the Prætorium, the hall of the Roman prætor, a new officer in Judea; past the palatial residences of the Jewish aristocracy, and of the Roman officials; past the theater, a new institution in the land of the Jews; past the Arena and the Palæstra, the "heathen stables of Abomination," as the Jews called them; past the magnificent palace of Herod, the king of the Jews. The Antonia loomed into view from the North-

east, on the edge of the Moriah; the white temple stood out against the sky like a specter of the night; the dark background of the hills of Samaria hove in sight like a wall of darkness to exclude Jerusalem from the joy of the rest of the world.

Rufus, newly taught, understood the position of Jerusalem in the designs of Heaven. The city of David was destined to become the Queen of the world—if she accepted her King. “But,” he soliloquized, “she is deaf and dumb and blind, as the whole mass of these wicked Jews; here she sits in idle admiration of her promised glory, while the strangers from the East are making their obeisance to *her* King! Ghosts and hobgoblins—in which I believe no longer—I would just take a trumpet and wake thee up to thy duty!—”

“What art sore at?” Judah, the leader of the guard, asked him. He must have mused aloud. “Sore, sir?” he replied; “nay; but sorry, that I cannot wake up this old maid Sion and show her the way to her lover. She will be too cold to love when He shall come to court her in blood. Zounds! Ye Jews are dolts! Why do ye not spread your garments under the feet of His Mother, and conduct her and her little King to your Temple, and set Him on your altar, and bend your knees to Him, and cheer

Him and hail Him with the loudest hurrah that ever went up from human breast!"

"What? Art mad? Who is our king?"

"That mite down at Bethlehem! Thou knowest; why dost ask me, a Roman by profession and a barbarian by birth!"

"And what about Herod's tenderness?"

"Herod?—Oh man of Israel! Herod ye send posthaste to his fathers. What purpose may Herod serve you when your Messiah is in your midst!"

"Keep thy counsel to thyself; thou shalt not want occasion to bethink thee of thy wisdom, when Shemaiah shall confront thee with the thieves of Hinnom."<sup>1</sup>

"Ah, the thieves of Hinnom! That band at Shurek's inn?—Has Shemaiah bagged them? Sly old fox, that Shemaiah!"

"Silence!"

They were passing the Temple. When Rufus had left the tavern, he had expected to be waylaid by the thieves, and, hence, after his first gallop, had proceeded slowly and cautiously, and had thus fallen into the hands of the guards. But it was a mystery to him, how Shemaiah had laid his hands on the band with such readiness, and had even had their horses taken out of their hiding place in Hinnom.

<sup>1</sup> A valley south of Jerusalem; deserted and filthy.

As they were filing through the huge gate of the Antonia, Rufus could contain his curiosity no longer. "How did Shemaiah know of the presence of those thugs in the lower city?" he asked the guardsman. Judah was much more liberal of speech in the security of the fortress. "Those men in the company of the thieves," he replied with a malicious smile "who wore the attire and the airs of bandits, were Zealots in truth; but Zealots of the class of the fighters in Israel. They were the emissaries of Shemaiah; and hence—" "*Illæ lachrymæ*,"<sup>1</sup> Rufus humorously completed the explanation, but uttered a shout of terror the next moment.

They had proceeded to the side of the court, where long, open corridors ran along beneath the vaulted ramparts. A few men were running hither and thither with smoky torches in their hands. The fitful flicker of the pitch flames lit up a terrible scene: along the wall were hanging by the neck some three dozen men, and Rufus soon recognized his late companions at meat. They were not yet all dead; some were still writhing in their agony, while the others hung as stiff as sticks. Rufus sickened at the ghastly sight, and turned away.

<sup>1</sup> "*Those tears*," a classic humorous phrase: *Hinc illæ lachrymæ*.

"Where is Shemaiah?" he asked his captors. But Shemaiah was just then descending the steps of the entrance of the tower, and drew near, pointing a finger at Rufus. "The last one of the band?" he inquired sternly. Judah nodded his head. "Hang him beside the other dogs!" Shemaiah commanded, without deigning to look at the captive. In a trice, Rufus's hands were bound, a rope was slipped over his head, and his legs were tied together. They raised him off his feet, and were about to carry him into the dismal vault, when he shouted at the top of his voice: "Hear, hear, Shemaiah! By Styx and Acharon and all the evil things of hell! Wouldst hang a *friend*? I am no robber; I am a Roman, and a soldier!"

And all the while he was kicking and pushing the hangmen from his sides, and trying to rise.

The "Roman" and the "soldier" would probably not have engaged the sympathy of Shemaiah, who had little use for that combination of oppressive paganism; but the "friend" appealed to him, made him stop and return to the scene. He bent down to look into the face of the evildoer. An indefinable smile crept under his eyes. "Art Rufus?" he exclaimed, laughing at the red-headed, angry victim of his peremptory order.

"Rufus, ay, as thou mayest most readily con-

vince thyself, if thou look attentively at my face and head. Cut me out of these halters, captain, lest I lose my breath and my patience. I feel the ends of both tied in a knot in my throat!"

"Cut the bands!—Now come with me!"

Rufus had met Shemaiah about two years before, when the revolt over Herod's impiety<sup>1</sup> had brought the Jewish and the Roman militia together in a sharp and bloody conflict. Rufus had been in the bodyguard of Coponius, the Judean Prætor at Cæsarea, and had not taken part in the battle. But he and his companions had arrived at the gate when the encounter was over, and the heathen emblem had already been torn down and dashed to pieces on the pavement. The prætor himself, a man of integrity and justice, had expressed his contempt of Herod's temerity in no uncertain terms. Rufus had only been waiting for him to sound the voice of condemnation, and joined in the subsequent abuse of Herod with a heartiness that attracted the attention of the Jewish captain. He was invited to a feast in Shemaiah's house on a day of leisure, and he accepted, and made an honest friend of the Jewish soldier. His sympathies were not with the Jews at large, nor

<sup>1</sup> The fastening of the golden eagle to the gate of the Temple, which was considered a sacrilege by the Jews.

very much with the Romans; but he bestowed them unstintingly on a man of such imposing valor and coolness as Shemaiah had exhibited in throwing back the Roman mercenaries, hired out to Herod to protect him in his own disaffected capital.

When they were seated in the captain's cozy chamber in the tower, Shemaiah expressed his astonishment at Rufus's desertion from the legions. "I am not a deserter," Rufus informed him blithely; "I have money, the best proof of my honest discharge." At which words he jingled the coins in his belt. "And this is only half of my pay; the other half I have presented to—to—well, to that mysterious Child of Bethlehem. I am about to go East with the Magi." "What knowest of the Child of Bethlehem?" Shemaiah inquired with sudden interest. A shadow of dread flitted across his brow.

"I think, Shemaiah," Rufus answered, hesitatingly, "that He is the King of the Jews."

"The King of Israel?"<sup>1</sup> Verily, I have almost reached this conclusion myself. A month ago I assisted Anna, a prophetess, down the Temple steps. She was feeble, dying, but full

<sup>1</sup> A Jew would never call Him: "King of the Jews." Note the scorn in Pilate's inscription on the Cross: "*Rex Judæorum*," King of the Jews, in defiance of their tenderness, and, in contrast (*John* 1, 49): "*Thou art the Son of God, the King of Israel!*" and *John* 12, 13.



of joy. She told me, that the child, over whose presentation she had gloried so much a month before, was to be the great Ruler, the expected Messiah. This announcement she made in the hearing of hundreds of sympathetic by-standers. Is it not wonderful, that these strangers should have journeyed from the far East to pay Him homage at His cradle!"

"Have ye not gone out, thou and the priests, to visit Him?"

"Some have gone out, but in secret; Herod's humors are so uncertain at present that we may not risk an offense against his insane conceit of being himself the Ruler of Israel according to sacred promise."

"But he has personally instructed the Magi, and directed them to Bethlehem with the express desire of paying his own respects to the Child!"

"Ahem!"—Shemaiah's scornfully pouting lips were more eloquent than his speech could have been.

"Well—ahem?" Rufus repeated.

"Knowest what Augustus is reported to have said of Herod? 'He would rather be Herod's hog than Herod's son.'<sup>1</sup> Dost understand the imperial joke?"

"But art thou also afraid of Herod?"

<sup>1</sup> A pun on the Greek *hys*, *hvos*, hog, and *hvos*, son.

“Nay! not for my own sake, but for the sake of my people.”

“But if that Child is the King of Israel, how dare you neglect Him? He can save you from Herod, and—from the Emperor! It is treason, what I say, I know full well; but I would rather die than deny Him! If Herod would ask me, what I have seen at Bethlehem, I would tell him plainly that I have seen the Son of God!”

“Rufus!”

“Ay; the Son of God, and the Savior of the world! Wilt that I shout it out of these windows over the sluggards’ heads, who sleep on, as if the day for their doing or undoing had not already arrived?”

Rufus had arisen in accordance with his half humorous threat, and was moving toward one of the windows which faced the Temple. But the frightened look of Shemaiah recalled him to soberness. The captain was as pale as death, and apparently unable to stir. Rufus instantly ran to his assistance, and shook him by the shoulders. But Shemaiah silently pointed at one of the southern windows, through which Rufus witnessed a sheaf of thin rays, like the fading tail of a comet, descending from the clouds over the place where the Magi had pitched their tents.

"His Star!" Shemaiah ejaculated.

"Nay," replied Rufus; "His Star is gone; this is a new sign, a signal from the other world;—dost now believe, that He is come from Heaven?"

"Anna has prophesied, that I shall go down with Him!" Shemaiah said with a shudder.

"Thou shalt not be His only companion in His triumph; if I live, I shall also go down, or up, with Him! It shall be the ambition of my life to cheer Him on in His conflict with the powers of darkness!"

"Thou knowest not whereof thou speakest; His conflict shall be as much with His own people as with the abominable pagans:<sup>1</sup>—lay thee to rest!"

"My mule!" Rufus objected; "I must first bed up my mule!"

"Thy mule is safe," retorted Shemaiah angrily and contemptuously; "hie thee to the next room, and go to sleep; it is too early to venture forth into the distrustful city."

Rufus obeyed, and flung himself on so comfortable a bed as he had never enjoyed in the sixteen years of his absence from home. With a fervent prayer to his newly discovered God-father for the safety of "that sweet child," he

<sup>1</sup> Compare the prophecy of Simeon.

closed his eyes, and left the world to its unprofitable worries and sufferings.

Shemaiah was confused and irritated.

Rufus's foolish concern about his mule had not caused, but aggravated his irritation. His confusion was the sum of various effects wrought upon his domineering mind. The tension between Herod and the priests, which had to-day drawn the priests over to the side of Herod, and had rearranged itself as a repellant force between Herod and the priests on the one side, and the better part of the people on the other, had removed Shemaiah entirely from his position midway between the leaders of Israel, with whom he had sided, and the leaders of the pagan innovation, whom he despised. The priests had at last taken a practical view of the events connected with the birth of the Messiah; they had concluded to await developments, consoling themselves with the thought that God Himself would take the lead in producing Him in His own good season, condoning their inactivity in view of the uncertainty of Herod's course.

Herod had manifested great zeal in learning everything concerning the Deliverer of the Nation, and every incident connected with the journey of the Eastern sages; but, without

doubt, agreeably to his accustomed manner of dealing with "traitors." No true son of Israel could approve the violent irruption of Herod's jealousy upon a state of things that was purely and sacredly a matter for the Jews to decide. Hence, the certainty attained through the questioning of the Magi, which had frightened the Jewish leaders into the arms of Herod, had torn Shemaiah away from the leaders, and had given so powerful an impulse to the eager and pious longings of the people, that they overstepped the bounds of sense and prudence, and hailed that Child, not only as the royal heir of David's throne, and the future Deliverer, but even as the Son of God. The re-establishment of the ancient theocracy, however, was as little desired by Shemaiah as by the priests. Hence Shemaiah had lost contact with both people and priesthood.

The dread of Anna's prophecy of his own "going down" with the Deliverer who had arrived in the person of that Child, and the absolute conviction of Rufus, who was everything but a dolt, that the Infant of Bethlehem was of Heavenly origin, added their weight of oppression to Shemaiah's burden of political apprehensions. He paced his chamber an hour, before he also retired. But his rest was interrupted by dreams of a triumph which he hated,

in the train of the Deliverer's victorious army, and of a reproach, which he applauded, at the side of the same Deliverer made the butt of the jeers of the patriotic Jewish rabble and of the taunts of the priests and elders. Hence when the hour of rising arrived, Shemaiah was not only confused and irritated the more, but in addition, tired and exhausted.

The sparkling eyes and the cheery salutation of Rufus did not drive the frown from his face. He returned an almost inaudible *Sholom*<sup>1</sup> to the hearty *Salve*<sup>2</sup> of his merry lodger, and scarcely deigned to look at him. He was standing at one of the windows facing south, towards Bethlehem, and intently scanning the horizon in that direction. Rufus was not a little taken aback at the unexpected change in the mood of his generous host, and cautiously placed himself at his side. The mists were lifting in the valleys of Hinnom and Jehosaphat, and over the Kidron, and the view towards Bethlehem was fast clearing. In a few minutes the roofs of the houses of Bethlehem began to push through the fog; then the upper windows blinked through the flying vapor: Shemaiah and Rufus held their breath; they were looking, looking closely, with heads bent forward and eyes

<sup>1</sup> "Peace!"

<sup>2</sup> Hail (Good morning)!

straining, for the tops of the tents of the Magi, over which that stream of light had descended after midnight: but no tents appeared!

They turned and faced each other utterly bewildered, the one from being unexpectedly relieved of the dread of an impending catastrophe, the other, from disappointment of his desire to accompany the pilgrims on their homeward journey. For a long while neither felt ready to give expression to his feelings. But at last Rufus soberly begged permission to take out his mule and depart. "I must follow them," he assured Shemaiah dejectedly.

"Whither?" the captain demanded curtly.

"On their tracks."

"Camels leave no tracks on these hard roads."

"Then I shall ask the men of Bethlehem, whither they have laid their course; they were surely not taken up on the wind and the clouds! I must find them! I must be near Nizra!"

"Who is Nizra?"

"The daughter of Caspar, the Persian."

"What is she to thee?"

"To me? *O dios immortales*<sup>1</sup>—Nay—O—! Oh, I reckon little, who—! She is nothing to me! But she is such a pretty, precious, mod-

<sup>1</sup> O ye immortal gods!—An exclamation of the Romans.

est, meek and merry maid, that old Charon<sup>1</sup> himself will fall in love with her, if she ever steps in his skiff to cross the Styx!<sup>2</sup> What a question out of the mouth of a breathing man! She is something to everybody who is privileged to see her: she is honey to me, and balsam, and perfume, and roses, and sister, and father and mother! Oh!—But I no longer find anything proper by which to swear! O Shemaiah: Let me go!”

Rufus sprang and danced about the room, and flung his arms and legs in the air, with the vehemence of one defending himself against a nest of young wasps on a bright summer's day. Shemaiah seemed less to despise than to pity the distracted swain. And yet there was nothing really serious about the antics of Rufus; they were purely the exuberant emphasis of his words, and the shedding of his innate humor and hilarity. But Shemaiah thought he had lost his head over “the modest, meek and merry maid” of the Orient.

“Swear by thy head, Rufus,” he bantered; “it is of no further use for anything!—I am glad that the Wisemen have absconded.”

“But I am not! Let me out!”

<sup>1</sup> The ferryman of the dead of Roman and Greek mythology.

<sup>2</sup> The “River of Darkness,” the boundary of the nether world.



“Thou must remain with me, and thou wilt, if thou listen to reason: thou hast been my guest this night, and hast been seen by my soldiers and by the servants; now, thou hast also been seen in the company of the pilgrims: if Herod should resent the insult of their refusal to revisit him on their return, as I fear me he will, he might easily conclude, that I, or some one else of our leaders, has been in collusion with the Magi, and that thou hast been our messenger. With Herod, a suspicion is as good a reason for murder as a crime. Hence thou shalt enjoy my hospitality until that caravan has journeyed beyond the reach of Herod’s power. If they have traveled towards the Southeast on the “Road of the Philistines,”<sup>1</sup> they shall be safe in another day.”

“But if Herod is informed that they have deceived him, he will kill that Child!”

“Herod is not well, and asks few questions; and what he is most eager to hear, his attendants are most careful to conceal from him. Besides, Rufus, if that Child is of Heaven, let Heaven prove its interest in Him by protecting Him! Thy faith has tender roots indeed!”

Rufus was not at all satisfied; he lacked the versatility of the Jew, to upset his arguments, and yet felt that the providence of Heaven was

<sup>1</sup> The Road of the Phœnicians.

in part committed to man, and was not to be rashly tempted. But a confession of his scruples to a well instructed Jew appeared to him equal to an admission of a slimness of faith such as that with which Shemaiah upbraided him.

"I would like to go out at all events," he confessed at last; "if I find a hole in thy walls, I shall creep through it, and draw my mule out after me!"

"Then thou shalt stay in the Antonia until the third day as my *prisoner*, Rufus!" Shemaiah replied angrily, and immediately called for a jailer to remove his friend. The subsequent protestations of obedience on the part of Rufus were in vain. "Give him meat and drink—and a stout lock," Shemaiah directed the bailiff, and signified by an impatient gesture that he wished to be rid of the man.

Judah was sent down to Bethlehem to investigate the condition of the town. He returned in the evening with the report, that the pilgrims had silently departed before morning, leaving their larger chests of clothing and provisions behind. This seemed to indicate that they were very much pressed to make haste. But the Child, he said, was still lodged in the house where the Magi had visited him.

The next morning, however, the Child and

His Mother had also disappeared, as hurriedly and as secretly as the pilgrims. Herod had already sent out scouts to Bethlehem to watch the Wisemen; but none of the scouts had returned with the disastrous news of their unceremonious departure.

On the third morning, Shemaiah imparted this information to Rufus, and released him, with the advice to flee as fast as possible beyond the boundaries of Idumea.

Now the storm might break over little Bethlehem; Herod's wrath could not strike the infant Messiah, and would probably spare the City, the feeling of which over the events of the last three months had become too tender for Herod to risk touching with a ruthless hand. Jerusalem had behaved most loyally amid the manifold temptation of bursting forth in a universal jubilee over the advent of her "*Just and Savior*,"<sup>1</sup> and of casting out the tyrant, whom Rome had seated over her on the throne of David. Shemaiah was well pleased with the behavior of the "*Abode of Peace*."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless he called a council of his subordinate officers, and, in secret, also of the captains and of the civil heads of the Zealots, and cautioned them to "keep their eyes open and

<sup>1</sup> Zach. ix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem.

their right hand armed"; "the contest for our national existence is begun this day," he said, as he dismissed the sober gathering late in the night.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN FLIGHT

It was only at the casual suggestion of Shemaiah, that Rufus had followed the road of Gaza. Shemaiah had said that the Wisemen had probably taken that road, which joined the great highway of Gilead, the Philistine road, at that important center of the western and southern sea-trade, so that they might not travel through Idumea, the native province of Herod, loyal enough to abet any of his criminal undertakings against the Jews. Yet it appeared more likely that they had taken the road of Hebron, which led directly south from Bethlehem to Hebron, whence it sent out its southeastern branch to the coast of the Asphalt Sea,<sup>1</sup> almost straight into the land of the southern Arabs, and into Egypt. That road was easy, and comparatively safe, because much frequented, and running mile after mile through prosperous villages and towns. The two days of grace which Herod had allowed them, and the two or three days more, which would pass before the alarm could

<sup>1</sup> The Dead Sea.

suffice to land their unencumbered caravan safe and sound in the blooming region of Segor, if be carried after them, even by the Imperial posts, whose services might be asked, would they thought it necessary to make a prolonged stop for rest, or wished to travel in the company of Melchior, whose journey lay in that direction, and who was acquainted with every detail of a journey by that route.

At all events, Rufus found neither trace nor echo of the passing of the Wisemen on the way towards Gaza, and it did not enhance his esteem for Marut and his companions that they had neglected to make the necessary inquiries at Bethlehem before they set out on their homeward journey. This grievance had as much been the cause of his curtness towards them, as his abhorrence of their comfortable unbelief. He hoped he "would never meet them again," and hurried on towards the celebrated "Treasury of the Merchants."<sup>1</sup>

At Gaza, where he arrived on the evening of the third day, he went about from tavern to tavern listening attentively, but silently, to the conversations of the travelers and merchants, some of whom had come down by boat from Tyre and Sidon; others had arrived from Pelusium in Egypt, others from Engaddi and

<sup>1</sup> Gaza.

Segor. But they evidently had no interest in the world save their trade. One had made a profitable purchase of figs, another, of apples, another of incense, and had only come to the city ahead of his mule-train in order to engage new drivers and guards. Rufus soon became disgusted with what he contemptuously called their "talking shop," looked after *Miss Pertinax*, and retired, full of cares and troubles over the complete disappearance of his Eastern friends.

The next morning he received pleasant news. An Egyptian bark had put in, hailing from Sidon, and directly bound for Pelusium with a cargo of Phœnician linens and woollens, consigned to a merchant of Memphis. At Gaza they were to load a small freight of resins and nard, in the use of which for the purpose both of perfuming and of embalming, the Egyptians delighted to debauchery and extravagance. That same night they would set sail for home.

Rufus mixed with the merry crowd of sailors, and succeeded in securing passage on their boat.

In the course of their exchange of confidences concerning the land of the Jews, the sailors related that they had made their last stop at the harbor of Cæsarea. There, they said, they heard rumors of new bloodshed threatening

the unfortunate city of Jerusalem, because the Jews had persuaded a company of kings and princes of the East, who had come to pay royal honors to one of the sons of Herod, to return to their country without doing Herod the intended honor. "It was a bit of Jewish jealousy," one of them continued the curious tale; "and now Herod has threatened that he will have every male child under two years old killed, to be revenged for the disloyalty of his subjects, unless the Eastern visitors be brought back within a week. The Roman merchants and slaves, who told us these things, had quite a number of stories to recount about that youngest son of Herod: that his father is loth to acknowledge him; that the last heir was born under way, and that, therefore, an imposition or substitution of a new heir was a likely scheme for some cunning usurper to practice, so that he might have a claim to the throne after Herod's death, which is imminent, they say, as the old man is crippled with the gout, and put to terrible straits with a painful disorder of the stomach. Then, they told us, the Jews stole the child, and are now keeping him in concealment from the fury of his father. The mother of that child is a Jewish maiden of ravishing beauty, they boast, and she also has vanished: which, altogether, is enough to make



even a lamb wish it were an ox or a crocodile, to manifest its resentment of such shameful deceit with becoming vehemence!"

Rufus, an eye-witness of these events, distorted out of the semblance of truth by the rambling fancy of pagan slaves, and, undoubtedly, touched up by the narrating sailors, knew not whether to smile or to weep at the grotesque and impossible report of things that he held the most sacred. But would the ignorant Egyptians profit, if he set their tale aright? He would have to rehearse with them all the information which Caspar had graciously given, which Nizra had eagerly confirmed, which the gentle, sweet Mother of that Child had vouchsafed, of the ancient traditions of the people of the earth, and of the inspired records of the Jews. " 'Who is not ready with the basket when the apples fall,' " Rufus quoted, " 'will get no apples'; these men are as little prepared as the Jews to cast out their idols from their hearts, and take God in; I will keep my peace; mayhap at least one or the other of these thoughtless pagans will put on his thinking-cap, and try to sift this rubbish of their report; then I shall help him out of the heap. I will give them a hint in that direction."

In accordance with this generous resolution,

Rufus assumed an air of the gravest astonishment, and replied:

"What strange things these Jews will allow people to accuse them of! Why, ye sons of the Pharaohs, Herod is seventy-three years old, and his youngest son is at least in his twenty-second year!"

"It is not a son of the queen!" the narrator interposed, looking wise.

"Nay, indeed! Herod has killed all his queens! I have known Herod and Herod's ways for ten years; ye—! but nay!" Rufus felt that he was losing control of himself, as it was certain he would, if he continued speaking; he appeared to himself, in his humorous self-scrutiny, like a stove: open the door, and it cannot but draw. But he was going to put in a kind word for the Mother of his Savior at all hazards. He spat out, whether in contempt of "Herod and Herod's ways," or of his own weakness, did not appear, and resumed authoritatively:

"That child over whom all Judea is set by the ears, is neither the son of Herod, nor of Herod's queen. I have seen Him and His Mother!"

At these words the sailors opened their eyes in admiration of their comrade's distinction; Rufus had scored a point.

“And those kings and princes of the East,” he continued, “were neither kings—although they are noble men—nor were they all from the East, although they came up from Jericho, which is east of Jerusalem. But they all had discovered a wonderful star *in the East*, that is, at the morningside of heaven: Do you follow me?—Some of those princes came from Saba, or Meroë, a city of your own land and people. They were as black as coal, and as fine as willows. Their leader’s name is Melchior.” “Melchior?” one of the sailors interrupted Rufus, and added thoughtfully: “A young man, tall, clean of features, dresses like a king, is retired and reticent, and—” here the man bent forward with a look of delighted confidence—“and bears a dark red mark of the shape of a double ax on his brow?”

“I think so; although I noticed only once, when he removed his diadem to lay it at the feet of that ‘son of Herod’ of yours, that he has a scar on his forehead, this shape,” Rufus said, laying one finger of the right across the tip of one of the left hand, forming a T shaped cross.

“Ay, surely, that is the man! I saw him at Memphis, about—let me see—two, three years ago. They said of him then, that he was a visionary; he went in and out at the burial places

of the kings, copied the inscriptions of the tombs, of the columns and walls of the temples all over the land, spoke little, and bowed three times every time he passed the great Neb;<sup>1</sup> people ridiculed him for bowing to an antiquated god, who is half buried in the sands of the desert. We have new gods now, and anyone who still pays his respects to moldy old Neb, must be a visionary, or labors under some other oddity of mind and character.—Melchior! Well! By Anahit!”<sup>2</sup> And the excited sailor blew his breath after his oath with the energy of a gust of wind.

“Slim prospects of converting a man who swears by a woman-god,” thought Rufus, and proceeded on his first plan of “giving a hint”: “Why did Melchior study the tombs of your kings?”—Caspar and Balthassar had told him, that they themselves had found the first traces of a buried religion of remarkable purity in the ruins of old temples and in the inscriptions of forgotten libraries of books made of clay.<sup>3</sup>

“Some of the tombs of our kings bear a date so early,” the sailor continued, “that they must have been built at the beginning of the world, when men were nobler and more pious than they

<sup>1</sup> Neb—“the Great Lord,” the great Sphinx near Kairo.

<sup>2</sup> An Egyptian goddess, whose principal seat of worship was Anu, or Heliopolis.

<sup>3</sup> The Babylonian and Assyrian monuments of literature.

are at present. But the people said of Melchior that he was searching out the history of old Neb, whom the Greek sages call Horus, and our priests, *Hor-em-chu*.”<sup>1</sup>

“What is ‘Hor-em-chu’?”

Rufus well remembered what Melchior had related of that mystic giant at the edge of the desert; but he was anxious to know, whether the sailors had also only a garbled version of the ancient tradition concerning this magnificent monument of the faith of their fathers, of the character of the report which they made of the “son of Herod.”

“*Hor-em-chu*,” the sailor readily answered, “means, ‘the Attendant of the Orient’; this is the reason for his facing east.”

“And who or what is the ‘Orient’?”

“The rising of the sun, I should think.”

“Missed!” exclaimed Rufus; “try again!”

“What knowest thou of our monuments!”

“Not much, but more than thou; that is, thou knowest nothing,” said Rufus, and snapped the fingers of both his hands in the sailor’s face.

“Well,—what *is* the ‘Orient’?”

“‘*Orient*’ is *His name*!”<sup>2</sup> Rufus shouted, quoting Caspar’s words, first in Greek, as they

<sup>1</sup> Pr., *Hoar-em-Khoo*.

<sup>2</sup> Zach. vi. 12: “Behold a man: Orient (the Rising) is His name.”

were taken from the Greek version of the Jewish prophets, and then in the dialect of Palestine; "it is *His* name! Hearest, pagan? The name of Him, whom thou knowest not; the name of God, of the Son of God, whom your fathers expected to come, and for the expectation of whom, and for the remembrance of whose expectation, they erected '*Hor-em-chu*,' a watchman of stone, who was to remind them of His coming. He *is* come, I tell thee, and He is here; but He has concealed Himself—that 'son of Herod,' sir, as the straw-headed Romans called Him! And His mother is the prettiest, loveliest, purest and *modestest* maiden between the Great Sea and—and the end of the world!

"Now thou knowest enough, I trow, to hold thy peace until thou arrive home, go to Memphis, and give my compliments to his lordship, old man Neb, and doff thy striped handkerchief, which is kind enough to cover so much ignorance and foolishness, and let the wind of the desert blow the cobwebs from thy eyes!" Rufus sprang up, and danced around among the amazed sailors for sheer fulness of exasperation at the "deaf and blind mummy"—which title he bestowed on his opponent under his breath.

But in the midst of Rufus's comical perform-

ance, a shout arose in the streets, and immediately the people ran together, noisily asking what had happened. "A courier of Herod!" somebody shouted, and Rufus straightened up, and stiffened his knees.

"A courier of Herod?" he repeated, vehemently nodding his head; "he is on the wrong track as much as I; the Wisemen have gone down the other way. Good luck to him for his wild-goose chase!"

But as a precaution, he covered his tell-tale shock out of sight, and inquired after the well-being of his mule, as one of the nondescript servants entered. "All ready for a sprint," the slave answered, and eyed Rufus suspiciously. But Rufus instantly caught the suspicious wink, reached over, and none too gently drew the knave to his side. The man, who was not strong, nor large of build, wriggled in the firm grasp of the red giant. "Why dost squint at me?" asked Rufus gruffly. But the man was so frightened, that he could not speak. Still, the humility of his face was not such as Rufus liked; it looked too much like "to-morrow we shall meet again."

"Be a good man," Rufus resumed, "and sit down to drink a pot of wine with me!" The man was seated before he had had time to say thanks, much too swiftly for his feelings.

Rufus sat down at his side, and poured out a goblet of wine. "Drink, and be merry, and forget thy troubles for a while!" he encouraged the bewildered man, and set him an example of a bibulous veteran to be admired, but not to be emulated. But while Rufus had held up his bumper with one hand, he had pinched the leg of his Egyptian neighbor with the other, and at the same time had winked in the direction of the door over the brim of the massive cup. The next moment he poured out another draught for the servant, and arose. "I will look after Miss Pertinax," he said, and went out.

Neither the sailors, nor the servant who seemed to be a Greek, knew aught of the *Domina Pertinax*.<sup>1</sup> The sailors entertained suspicions of their own in accordance with Rufus's indelicate warning and unmistakable wink; he was about to leave. But he had already paid part of his ferriage, and, hence, was free to desert them, if he so chose. The servant applied himself with considerably greater ease to his grateful task after being delivered from the dread of the "white monster."—He actually mustered sufficient courage to designate Rufus by that uncomplimentary epithet a few minutes later.

<sup>1</sup> "Lady Stubborn."



The tavern where Rufus had "put in," was about two miles distant from the port, although situated in the lower city. The courier had entered the upper city, and had alarmed all the bailiffs within the walls to search after a "tall man with red hair, clad in the garb of a huckster, and riding a stout mule; a stranger, neither Roman, nor Jew, nor Greek, but probably a barbarian from across Gaul or Britain." Not long after Rufus had left the tavern, this signal was tried on the dark-skinned sailors and on the Greek, as it had been tried on everybody else within reach. During the procedure, they overheard the expressions of condolence of the Idumite and Arabic bailiffs for the "poor sinner," if he be caught. "They have gathered in the other three, who were seen in the company of the Eastern princes," they said, "and woe to them, when Herod vents his fury on them!" and made other similar comments, neither quite charitable nor vengeful.

Not long after, the sailors also left for their craft, and were not a little rejoiced and amused to see riding ahead of them, his broad back covered with a flying white mantle, and his head wrapped in a silken cloth, as secure as a prince, and as majestic as a Roman general, Rufus!

"Have they caught the other three?" he in-

quired immediately on their overtaking him.

"They have them, and they are after thee also," they cautioned him.

"I know it; but they cannot swim to Egypt. I have no desire at all to be shaved by Herod's wardens. Hurry now, make ready, and off we are!" With that he sprang from his mule, led it to the wharf, and coaxingly smacked his lips. When the beast stood on the last plank, he pushed it off, sprang after it, and continuing his encouragement, swam out towards the bark. "Miss Pertinax" was an army mule, and made the best of the surprise to which her crafty master had treated her.

The Egyptian sailors enjoyed the prank, and rowed after the twain in their yawl. The guards and the rest of the crew hailed them with a shout of jolly welcome, and having with some difficulty hauled the suspicious mule aboard, turned their helm, and sailed away. Rufus stood at the stern and unwound his head-cloth, and unfurling and waving it like a flag, "*Valetel!*"<sup>1</sup> he shouted, "and my deepest regrets to Herod, that I can not oblige him with my neck!"

Some of the bailiffs had just arrived at the dock. "Come on," Rufus cried to them, em-

<sup>1</sup> "Good-bye!"

phasizing his invitation with energetic waving of his arms, "come on; it is not cold!"

But they sent a curse after him, and returned to announce the escape of the accomplice of the "traitors" to the fuming courier.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TENDER FIRST FRUITS

The captain of the Imperial posts who was well acquainted with Shemaiah, had sturdily refused to lend the service of the Emperor to the Jewish king in a purely "religious chase," as he named the pursuit of the Wisemen. "They were not come to see Herod," he explained to a Herodian officer, "and they required not Herod's permission to travel on the roads of Rome." That curt reply was final.

Hence Herod sent his own couriers, a dozen of the best riders, on each of the two main roads, that of Gaza, and that of Hebron. They bore written orders, signed by Herod, and addressed to all the Jewish officials along the route, commanding everyone under penalty of the king's disfavor, to give all possible assistance to his couriers.

Marut and his two companions betrayed themselves by tarrying at the inns, and tasting of the pleasures obtainable at many of them, which were not the most reputable. A little below Cadytis they were picked up at a tavern, just

after they had planned to cross over to the road of Hebron, which would lead more closely by their homeward course than the constantly declining road of Gaza. They were immediately hurried back to Jerusalem. But they had given such a close description of their fleeing jovial companion, that the single courier who was dispatched after him thought Rufus could be caught as easily as a sparrow.

But Rufus joined to his facility of speech the simplicity of the dove, or the sagacity of the starling, according to the requirements of each situation. Nor did he hesitate to act the goose, if that served his purpose. At all events, he had escaped by a hair's breadth, and had also saved his precious "Miss Pertinax," by whom he would stand as a soldier stands by his comrade. But why he was at all bent upon going to Egypt, he had not yet disclosed; perhaps, because he wanted to see "*Hor-em-chu*," the Neb; perhaps, simply because he was disgusted with his flight before the ever-present danger of detection by the Jewish and Idumite population. Herod's arm reached a good stretch beyond geographical Idumea and Judea, and if Rufus wished to join the Magi, he would be obliged, at the end of his way, again to head his mule east, through the southern corner of Edom. By this time he was convinced that they had

held directly southeast in a direction opposite to his own.

The band who had taken up Marut, having learned that the Wisemen had not left by the road of Gaza, but most probably by the road of Hebron, if indeed they had not followed one of the numerous winding paths, experienced travelers that they were, through the hills and woodlands of eastern Edom, which would lead them aside from the danger of discovery and pursuit, cut across the country at Gabatha, on their return, in order to look for news of the success of their comrades on the other line of the chase. But only one insignificant incident of the passing of the Magi had so far been reported: At Kerieth, a small and poor mountain village on the borders of Idumea, a troop of half-grown boys under the leadership of one Judas, who distinguished himself by his insolence and precocious generalship, had put the pilgrims to extreme annoyance; they had jeered them, made caustic remarks about the "overgrown, hunchbacked sheep" that they were riding, and had even cast stones at them. It seemed certain, then, that they had withdrawn from the highway, and had followed the lost by-ways of the mountains, probably under the guidance of a kind-hearted mountaineer or of an avaricious scout; for either kind of char-

acter was likely to be found anywhere among the Sons of Esau.<sup>1</sup>

The couriers, therefore, had proceeded to Bethlehem, where they intended to investigate the circumstances of the Magi's departure on their own account. But when they drew near the little nest of the shepherds, they were startled by the wailing and lamenting which seemed to rise in concerted shrieks of pain and terror over the village and the surrounding hamlets. Mothers were seen frantically running hither and thither, crawling into every nook, between piles of wood and stacks of straw, with their infant sons clasped in their arms in deathly desperation. The executioners of Herod, armed with dirks and swords dripping with the blood of their innocent victims, were eagerly pursuing them. One of the unfortunate mothers ran directly into the band of the couriers, and cast herself on her knees before the beast of their leader. "Take him, take him away!" she pleaded piteously, holding up her child towards him. The officer had to rein in his horse to keep from riding her down. He pitied her, but he could not help her; it was the king's order, and he could interfere only at the risk of his life. But he halted on the spot, when he beheld one of the murderers,

<sup>1</sup> In Edom, or Idumea.

his garments bespattered, his sword reeking with warm blood, spring at the woman, tear the child from her desperate embrace, and butcher him, throwing the palpitating little body back into her still extended arms. "Take him *Thou*," she moaned, "for whom his blood is spilled," and fell to the ground in a dead faint over the crushed flower of her bosom.

Marut was as pale as a ghost. If this was an illustration of Herod's dealing with "traitors"—what was in store for himself and his companions!—

But after that day Herod's sufferings became unbearable. He howled like a wild beast; he was beside himself with the torments in his intestines. In a few days, maggots appeared in his flesh, and the stench of his sick-bed drove even his wife and his children from his side. He was removed to the healing baths of Calirrhoë by the Salt Sea,<sup>1</sup> and thence, after a month of little mitigated suffering, to Jericho, where he died in despair, after having pronounced sentence of death on one more of his sons,<sup>2</sup> and having given orders that the Jewish nobles, whom he had bidden assemble at the provisional court, should be put to death at the instant of his own dissolution.

<sup>1</sup> Dead Sea.

<sup>2</sup> Antipater.



The circumstance of Herod's suddenly aggravated sufferings served a good turn in the fate of Marut. So small a matter as the capture of the three youths was overlooked in the confusion over the problem of Herod's succession. Couriers had been flying for weeks between Rome and Jericho, bearing to the Emperor the wishes of Herod, and bringing back the suggestions and approvals of Augustus relative to the last will and testament of the dying king. Hence Shemaiah, who had waited a few days for news from the pursuers of the Magi, released the Persians with the advice to journey directly to Tarichæa in Galilee and to cut across the wild country of the Hauran, "where you will find rough manners, but fine men," he said kindly, pitying the terrified young strangers.

The couriers of Herod, fearing to face their cruel master with a report of the failure of their mission, returned only after the tyrant's death. The Magi had made their escape unmolested.

## CHAPTER XI

### HOMEWARD BOUND

A few leagues below Hebron, Caspar had divided his company into two pretty nearly equal parties. Thus they could more easily mislead and confuse their pursuers—for they did not expect to be allowed to depart in peace after the earnest warning against the treachery of Herod—and also procure sufficient quantities of provisions. The event proved the correctness of Caspar's calculations. Herod's couriers received reports right and left, from the villages in the mountains, from the towns in the plains of the Dead Sea, and from various stations of the main road, that the Eastern pilgrims, who could not be mistaken for their peculiar manner of dress, had been seen everywhere. Melchior, who had been appointed head of the second party, had taken the precaution to redivide his train, so that he himself with about twenty well-mounted young men retained the original course on the road of the merchants, while the other subdivision, under a hired guide, sought out the solitary paths of

the orchards and vineyards that stretched along the coast of the sea in the direction of the ancient kingdom of the Sodoms. After rounding the southern end of the sea, they would wait for the others in the region of secure and beautiful Segor.

It was a new delight for the succeeding bands as each arrived, fatigued indeed, but relieved at last of the dreadful fear of falling into Herod's clutches, to note the contrast between the smiling fields, the cheerful inhabitants, and the prosperous villages of the blessed country of the South, and the mistrustful air both of the people and of the landscape of Judea. They had left Bethlehem behind fast vesting herself with the frail and timid beauty of the Judean spring; they had also seen, and for a moment rejoiced in the splendid glory of bloom and verdure of the Jericho valley: but neither could compare in quiet beauty or in rich splendor with the plenteous wealth of Segor's fields and orchards. Here bloom and bud were clustered about the maturing fruit, although the foliage was yet interspersed with the gems of dallying spring, while the gleaming store of fruit, nut, and berry, the gift of busy summer, dropped, popped and sprang from the groaning boughs, to ease their burden, and to make room for the succeeding laughing abundance.

And the sunshine in the happy faces, and upon the joyful earth, upon the silvery ripples of the rills, mirrored on the still surface of the lake, poured down from the wide, laughing firmament, with kindly merriment took possession of the hearts of the hunted strangers.

Here they would tarry to rest themselves, before they would again set out in the face of lesser dangers, but of graver obstacles. Long stretches of solitude and desert, lofty mountain ranges, rivers and forests lay still between their station and their homes. After two days Melchior proceeded to the South; but the others would resume their journey in the direction of the North and East, through Moab and Aram, towards the coast of the Caspian Sea, where the countries were sparsely inhabited, where the rivers had neither ford nor ferry, and where the spring smile of the valleys was reflected in the chill and scant blush of the eternal snows of inhospitable heights.

Nizra's courage had begun to fail with her health. The incessant anxieties, and the merciless pressure of their flight, having overtaken them without warning after a single day of bliss and delight, so great, so sweet, that it made the rude and cruel shock of their disenchantment tenfold ruder and more cruel, had broken down her strength of body and soul. The ter-

rible revelation, that Herod's eagerness was but the mask of heartless treachery; that he could at all conceive the purpose of killing the Child of Heaven; their own helplessness in the face of the peril of the Child and His Mother, whom they had not been able to warn of the impending disaster, so urgently had they been bidden to arise and depart: all these evils, magnified, darkened and heaped up to a mass of hopeless misfortune in the shadows of ineffective compassion and solicitude, had weighted and worn away the stout confidence of the delicate and tender maiden.

Her cheeks had grown pale unto translucence, her eyes had lost their luster, and a languid smile sat unchangeably on her face, a still invitation for the grim Reaper to cut down the prematurely drooped flower.

Her fond father noticed with deep sadness that she failed more day after day. He had made a great sacrifice for the Son of God in undertaking the wearisome journey; would God ask the immeasurably greater, that of the life of his beloved child? He lavished upon her the tenderest devotion of a loving father's heart, not effusive, not loud, but so earnest and affectionate, that it elicited a smile of happiness and a kiss of love from the listless sufferer, as often as he tried its charm upon her.

But the week of rest and comfort in the paradise of Segor had produced an agreeable change in her health. Without being cheerful, she seemed to have regained the sense of appreciating the anxiety manifest about her, and hence she visibly forced herself to lend her gratitude a kindlier expression than a slight blush of happiness. She broke her dreary silence, and begged that the journey might be resumed.

When they reached Rabbath Amon<sup>1</sup> in Peræa, almost directly opposite Jerusalem, and rode into the court of the inn, they saw stalled there the dainty dromedaries of Marut and his companions. Nizra forthwith pleaded with her father to move on; but he objected with quivering lips, that she stood in need of rest, and that with her father and so many friends watching over her, she had no cause to fear annoyance at the hands of the prince. "I had much rather have journeyed to Egypt with Melchior," she protested, "than to my own land with Marut, if my father had given me leave with his blessing."

"Wouldst rather be the wife of the black governor, than of a Parsa prince?" Caspar questioned in surprise.

"Nay, father mine! I shall be the wife of

<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia.

no man to the end of my life. I have seen the King, and have sworn to Him, that I will be His sister; I have seen the Prince, to whom I have been espoused from the day of my birth."

But the first information which Marut gave of his experiences at Bethlehem, was the detailed recounting of the murder of the children as he had witnessed it. "*He* could not escape the universal slaughter," he said in conclusion with a look of unfeigned concern at Nizra, who was hanging on her father's arm, trembling and pale, her large, brimming eyes directed towards heaven.

The rest of the long journey they traveled together. Nizra was practically insensitive to all the kindnesses bestowed upon her, except the untiring devotion of her father. She never spoke another word, but to him; the zeal of Marut in countless efforts to comfort her, to reassure her, that *He* may have escaped after all, was wasted upon her. "Have we been mistaken?" she asked her father one day; "if *He* was the Son of God, could Herod kill *Him*?" That thought was her only care. "Because *He is* the Son of God," Caspar comforted her, "I am confident that *He* lives. Were we not warned by a vision in our sleep? Could *He* who has guided us, not also guide His Mother?"

Comfort thee, Nizra; I have never doubted that He lives!"

After that earnest assurance from her father, she recovered in part the little hold on life, that she had been ready to give up, if her ecstasy had proved to be a delusion, and her faith in God, a mistake. She clung to her father with renewed tenderness and confidence, and she repulsed Marut with renewed resentment of his ill-timed entreaties for her favor.

Six months they had been under way. At their entrance into the royal city they anticipated an enthusiastic ovation, a greeting from the king and from the priests and nobles. They expected to be conducted to the court, or to the temple, amid universal congratulations. At least Nizra should have been borne in triumph through the streets on the shoulders of her former friends and daily companions, the noble maidens of the Parsa. But when they entered the great gate, and their return had been made known in stealthy whispers, they met frowning and threatening faces everywhere; no king, no priest nor noble, to extend a hand of welcome, or to repeat a word of friendship: how their faith had separated them from their brethren!



## CHAPTER XII

### IN SAFE RETREAT

The Egyptian bark which carried Rufus, landed at Pelusium without mishap. To that point, he had paid his fare. But when he realized, on disembarking, that traveling on mule-back in the endless swamps of bulrushes and tall reeds, in the maze of thickets twined together by vines of the thickness of a man's arm, was a more arduous undertaking than he and "Miss Pertinax" would enjoy, he returned in the evening to the ship's master, and bargained for an extension of his journey up the Nile. He was told that there was a road made up almost entirely of bridges, beyond the confines of Pelusium, leading in the direction of Memphis. "It is safe enough for a man and a mule," the jolly skipper assured him; "for the trade of highwayman is the most ungrateful to ply in Egypt, as every thief and robber is hanged at the scene of his crime." "But you catch them first," Rufus rejoined facetiously.

"Well, it is this way," the skipper explained phlegmatically: "We do not allow an Arab

to cross the Walls,<sup>1</sup> unless he submits to a close inspection of all his effects down to his living skin; and an Egyptian vagabond is too lazy to run away. Hence, when the watchmen at the walls entrap an armed prowler, they hang him in anticipation of his wicked work; and when we find a sluggard on the highways, we put him to work turning the scoop-wheel at the dykes until he is too lame for mischief, and consents to labor for hire: this method has reduced the number of all sorts of criminals to a handful, whom we keep for curiosities, safely locked in a dark prison. We exhibit them to our growing boys, if these betray any particular propensity to laziness, and drive the lesson home with the rod of the teacher. In this land we have not nursed the drones, and hence the public security, prosperity, and peace. If thou hadst not my pass in thy hands, thou wouldst also be held to assist the River in irrigating the elevated fields."

"Master," Rufus replied, a little nervous over the disclosures concerning the educational methods of Egypt, "Master, I think ye Egyptians are carrying a good thing too far, when ye extend your solicitude to the adults. It creates order, *Meher*—! but it is too severe to

<sup>1</sup> The ancient "Walls of Egypt," northeast, to connect the water protection against the invasion of the Asiatics.

be pleasant! Why, sir: do ye not allow a man to make a holiday for himself?"

"Ay, a holiday every week, either in honor of a king, or in honor of one of the deities of the various regions; but a work-day is no holiday, and a good man is no thief, and a good boy needs the rod only now and then to remind him that he has superiors over him."

"So ye do spank a boy just as a precaution?"

"A preventive, Rufus, a preventive," the captain hastened to submit, as he did not know whether to interpret the stranger's rising excitement as fear or as exasperation. But Rufus laughed outright and, "*Mehercule!*" he burst out, "ye Egyptians are eminently practical people. I shall have the tender reverse of my humanity padded at the first saddler's shop in Memphis; I am afraid, I lack the desired decorum, or I am too good to escape a dose of your 'preventive!'"

"Wouldst rather leave us here? The boundary of the land is only a day's journey distant."

"Nay, nay; I would rather kiss the rod than miss kissing the great *Neb!* I will sail to Memphis under thy protection. I must kiss the brow of the *Neb!*"

"Nay, not the brow; it rises forty cubits above the base."

"May I not climb up?"

"It would be thy death!"

"Are ye still so proud of him?"

"Proud? We venerate him for the respect of our fathers."

"And have forgotten his purpose!"

"The sailors may have, and the slaves; the priests and scribes have not forgotten it. They shall be astonished to hear that the Expectation of the *Hor-em-chu* has been fulfilled, and the *Rising* has appeared! Rufus, I would like to embrace thee for the joy of thy blest teaching!"

"Do it, son, and be not afraid!" Rufus encouraged him, and clasped the dusky philosopher in an affectionate, but by no means too gentle embrace over his hard leather coat. The captain groaned once or twice, and was glad to be released from the powerful arms, which had raised him up to the height of Rufus's lips. He touched them with his own; but the kiss was not as fervent as had been contemplated; his breath nearly failed him.

At Memphis, Rufus set out on his visit to the curious, gigantic monument of the faith of

dim antiquity. The colossal figure of stone could be plainly seen at a distance of many leagues, stretched out in the sand at the border of the desert, and raising its imposing head with the dreamy, solemn face aloft towards the gates of heaven. What a grandeur of conception must have inspired the builders of this petrified Hope of a mighty, yet humble generation! What a majesty of form, pose and expression! The noble head, the reproduction of a nobler type of humanity, poised in the attitude of attentive silence and intense expectation, raised straight above the rugged breast, neither thrown back with the air of defiance, nor inclined with the affectation of timidity or fear, presented the embodiment of a loftiness of inspiration, the like of which may animate the face of a devout seraph at the throne of God!

Rufus stood in silent meditation. No wonder that Melchior claimed, the *Neb* was to the ancients the Watchman at the portals of a new Paradise which were to descend with the Son of God from the hallowed halls of heaven! "It is come," he said fervently, "the 'Expectation of the Gentiles'; it is come to us!—Will they receive Him, and allow Him to establish the Kingdom of Peace?"

Then he drew near, and imprinted a hearty,

reverent kiss on the cold stone. "Good old *Neb*," he soliloquized in his own humorous vein, which suffered not to be repressed longer than for one or two solemn thoughts, "I would rejoice to see thee smile, despite thy stone face, if thou couldst see thy little, weak, dimpled, lovely ward of Bethlehem. Ward? Nay; thy Master, for whom thou hast been watching and waiting these thousands of years; and thy God and mine, who hath made Himself the ward of men!"

At that moment the sun sent its first greeting over the land, and its golden-winged messengers, alighting on the brow of the *Hor-em-chu*, poured over the silent face a glowing wave of joy and gladness. "Neb! hast seen thy Lord?" Rufus exclaimed; the significant play of the brilliant rays in the majestic features of the stone giant had overwhelmed him with its glory. Was not a new Sun come into the world, the "*Orient*," the *Rising of Eternal Glory*?—

From Memphis, Rufus journeyed to *On*.<sup>1</sup> That celebrated seat of the worship of Anahit, one of the most ancient goddesses of the Egyptians, and of Rah, the "father of the gods," lay on his route northward, and held out such great promises of gain for his curiosity, that he

<sup>1</sup> Heliopolis; the Egyptian *Anu*.

would not pass it by without inspecting its imposing temples, and questioning its learned priests. It was noted also for the beauty of its parks and gardens, its arcades of antique statuary, its dwellings built of red stone, which glittered and glistened like polished marble, and its wide circle of verdant fields and of rich orchards. *On* was the friendly gate of wealthy Gosen, a most fertile region locked between the arms of the Nile, where the traces of Israel's Hope may not yet be wholly obliterated, and where the echo of Israel's hymns may not yet have died; for it was here, that Jacob had settled his children nearly two thousand years before, and it was here, that his son Joseph had been made Viceroy of "Both Egypts."<sup>1</sup>

Rufus, therefore, paid his first respects to the priests. On entering the temple, a small city in itself, he was bidden to prostrate himself in adoration before the Serapis, a large, pampered bull, whose stall formed the sanctuary, and whose manger, the altar. Rufus objected. He had learned too much of the secrets of the God of Heaven, not to know that the superstitious adoration of the huge brute was a degenerate form of some originally nobler worship, and set his purpose to investigate the truth.

<sup>1</sup> Upper and Lower: at times, two separate monarchies.

"My friend," he said to the priest in the jargon picked up from the sailors, "let me tell thee, what I will do: If thou wilt come, and lay thee down on thy face before my *mule*, I will return, and lay me down before thy *ox*."

This was blasphemous. The priest raised his hand to strike Rufus in the face; but Rufus caught the blow on his palm, and held the priest's hand in a tight clutch, while he stooped, and grasped also the other hand of the squirming hierophant of Apis.<sup>1</sup>

"What darest thou!" groaned the Egyptian.

"What thou wouldst dare thyself, if thou wert as big as I. I will not allow anyone to strike me, if I can hinder him. Nor will I think any less of my faithful mule than of anybody's ox. Where have ye bought that beast? It is a sturdy brute, well fed, and sleek, and somewhat of a bully, to judge from his saucy snort."

"It is our god!" the priest exclaimed in despair.

"But I have seen as good bulls everywhere from Memphis to this place; are they less your gods, because they are at liberty? Must an ox be tied up to be a god? *Mehercule*, man of the ox!—" (Rufus's good resolution, to abstain from swearing by the heathen deities,

<sup>1</sup> Apis—Serapis; Ser-Apis=Lord Apis.



had melted down in the company of the irreverent sailors.)—"Why dost not open thy eyes to see that this bull is as little like a god as I! Why do ye keep the lazy beast in this beautiful building, which is as fit to be a house of the God of Heaven as the Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem!— Hast ever heard of it?"—

Rufus had bent down his face so low at the last words, that he blew his breath into the powdered and perfumed wig of the nonplussed votary of the Bull. But the priest was unable to reply in words. He was so exasperated that, when Rufus released him, he uttered an inarticulate howl, and ran away. "Get thee hence!" Rufus suggested to himself, and left the temple without much reverence for the decorum of the slow and stately gait of the other priests, who had turned from their prayer, and were slowly moving towards the portal where he slipped out.

Rufus returned to his inn as fast as he could walk without attracting undue curiosity, sprang on his mule, and rode away towards the eastern end of the large city. There, among the lowly, in the ancient colony of the Jewish remnants of the bondage, he would hide until the incident were forgotten, or, at least, until he could depart with more security.

The houses of the suburb were not as stately as those of the city. Neither was there temple and altar, court and palace, in the busy village; for the temple of the Jews was built on the very border of Heliopolis. But its wide market place was a faithful reproduction of similar centers of life and traffic in the land of the Jews. The gaudily, but scantily dressed wine merchants, the almost naked fruit venders, the dealers in provisions and provender, with little more pretensions at fashionable attire than affecting the red and yellow headcloth and the blue breeches of the native slave; the portly butchers, who bore the living advertisement of their savory wares in the generous proportions of their figures, exposed to view, save for the kindness of a grimy apron; the complacent Arabs in lengthy argument over the value of their trash and trumpery of gilded metal and colored glass, the loud traveling merchants from Syria and Phœnicia, resplendent with the many colors of their dress to illustrate the effects of their linens and woollens on the beauty of man and woman; the haggling, scolding, protesting mass of buyers, trying to wheedle the merchants; all this do and daring recalled to the mind of Rufus the oft relished scenes of the markets of the Jewish cities of Palestine, and he plunged into the agitated crowd with a shout

and whoop of merriment, that attested the keen pleasure of his recollection.

He had exchanged his Roman silver for the coin of the realm at the port; he was ready for any deal, as long as the Jews would not attempt to cheat him. He needed a coat, as the big white mantle which had adorned his shoulders when he rode down in state to the dock from Gaza, was left with the sailors; he had found it in the stable at Gaza, among the effects of some other guest, and had appropriated it in order to conceal his original garments which would have betrayed him. The silken headgear had had the same misfortune. The sailors had promised him that they would restore them at the inn of Gaza on their next voyage; and since the Egyptians were honest people, he set his conscience at rest over the enforced injury to his sense of justice.

Then Rufus critically surveyed "Miss Per-tinax." The halter was patched, the saddle-roll was frayed, the blanket was in tatters, and the leather bands on the ankles of her forefeet were worn through on the inside. "If I procure a new suit for myself," he mused earnestly, "I must not forget the trimmings of the *domina*;<sup>1</sup> and if I buy all I want, I shall be as poor as a badger in midwinter.

<sup>1</sup> The "Lady."

I think I will keep my money, and trust to luck and good weather!"

He felt affectionately of his purse, patted it gently, and pushed back the buckle of his belt another inch, to insure a tight hold on his treasure. "Nay, Miss Pertinax," he consoled himself, "we are not on parade; before we would arrive in the land of the Parsa, we would, at all accounts, require making over: we are good enough for each other, and no one else need admire us, if he does not see fit, and has not a look of pride to spare for a Roman veteran and his—poor imitation of a steed of Mars!"<sup>1</sup>

But he would nose about a while among the noisy crowds, just to inspect the curious heaps of indescribable varieties of articles, which were considered indispensable to the comfort or the adornment of Oriental life. "How little one needs, how much one craves, and what energy is wasted," Rufus thought, "in procuring a comfort, and getting a burden! Life is easier without its trappings—and my mule is comfortable enough without a blanket—hey, man! I say!" he roared across a pile of frippery at an old Jew who was straining every effort to convince some women, that no queen gloried in a more costly robe than the cast-off

<sup>1</sup> The Roman *god of war*.

crimson coat which he was rubbing, feeling, pulling and waving before their eyes. Before he became aware of the call of the stranger, Rufus had dismounted, unstrapped the unsightly blanket, and had rolled it up, inside out; "I am poor," he began to persuade the cunning Semite, "and I am willing to take a hat in exchange for this covering of my beast. I bought this in Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jews; but it is too heavy in the heat of Egypt."

Rufus had espied among the trumpery a cap, made of leather, and trimmed with metal, probably a relic from the dress of a soldier. It looked so like a Roman helmet, that his love for military equipment, of which he already wore the leather coat, was revived, and he essayed to obtain it with as little expense as possible. He would cover his mule with his saddle-roll, and ride without a saddle, the use of which with him was at any rate only a concession to custom.

The Jew insisted on opening the blanket; but Rufus did not approve. "I have no time to lose," he remonstrated; he had not overlooked the gleam of interest in the eye of the merchant at the mention of Jerusalem. But he turned up a corner of the blanket and exhibited the Hebrew marking, consisting in the name of Sepha Ben Shohareh, a celebrated dealer in

woolen goods. The name, and the corner on which it was traced, were the best preserved portions of the article. "Give me that old soldier's cap in exchange," Rufus continued, "and let us not haggle like market women over a bargain which is a profit to thee and a boon to me; seest that my hair is sunburnt, and ready to catch fire at any moment;" and Rufus doffed the red cloth, an alms from the sailors, and exposed his head to the interested view of the merchant and the by-standers.

The humorous allusion to the color of his hair, singular and strange in a land of uniformly black hair, was, perhaps, the most effective argument. The Jews stared at him, first with wonder, and then with pity, and the merchant handed the cap over with a look of helpless embarrassment.

The scene had been attentively observed by a man, who had come along the road from the outskirts of the market, mounted on a camel, and evidently hurrying through the bustle and tumult towards the city. The tall figure of the red-haired stranger had attracted his attention. He had stopped at the group, and was waiting for Rufus to turn his head.

"*Me*— What! A black ghost!" Rufus exclaimed, as he turned, and faced Melchior.

But Melchior smiled, and gave him a sign

that he wished him to follow out of the crowd.

When they were alone, riding back towards the fields, amid which a few solitary dwellings appeared above the whitening wheat fields and the dark arbors of the grape-vine, Melchior asked Rufus with undisguised pleasure at the unexpected meeting: "What has drawn our good friend and guide into the land of the *Neb*?"

"The *Neb*!" Rufus echoed the address with equal enjoyment of the distinguished company. "I wished to see and kiss him, and I have done it! I have also seen the big ox in the temple of *On*, and I have made an attempt at converting the priests from their superstition; but I am accustomed to more practical methods of teaching sense than those of the tongue; I had to flee from them. But—Melchior, sir! To think that men may kneel to an ox! Why do they keep so sleek a beast from the plow and the cart!"

Melchior indulgently smiled at the fiery defender of his new religious convictions. Not many days before, Rufus would at most have shrugged his shoulders at the manifold manifestations of the religious impulse. But since he had been made acquainted with the deep and powerful undercurrent of original truth, upon which the various forms of idolatry had grown

through neglect and ignorance like weeds in stagnant waters, he had conceived an impetuous aversion for the distortions of the Divine in every rite and form of pagan worship. So apt and eager a pupil deserved to be enlightened.

“Friend,” Melchior explained, “the bull is the symbol of Joseph, of whom Caspar has taught thee, that he was the son of Jacob, and was made the governor of Egypt in Pharaoh’s stead. When the children of Jacob left the land, the memory of the great man, blest of his father with the promise that he should be the heir of the *Benediction of the Fathers*, remained. Also his glorious name was indelibly stamped upon the hearts of our people, and is discovered in the *Osiris* of our ancient mythology. Aseneth, his wife, is our *Isis*; and *Horus*, the great *Neb*, or *Hor-em-chu*, the ‘*Orient*’ of the Jewish prophets, is the outward expression of the *Blessing*, which was promised to them. Even among his own people, Joseph was honored with honors due to God alone: the *Golden Calf* of Sinai, and the groves dedicated to the worship of the Calf in Samaria, the portion of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, preferred before his brother Manasses, were symbolic expressions of the Israelitic hopes for the *Blessing* to issue from Joseph’s house.



The worship of the Calf was a dangerous error with the Jews, very apt to lead them into a secular conception of the Savior's mission; but it was not so dark and dismal an error as the idolatry into which our own people have fallen in the course of these many centuries."

"Didst not tell me," Rufus rejoined doubtfully, "that the *Neb* was erected long before the children of Jacob were settled in this land?"

"Ay, Rufus, I did; but let that not disturb thy confidence. The Promise of Jacob was only a repetition of a still older blessing.<sup>1</sup> The *Neb* was built by an ancient generation of Egyptians, who had possessed the land before the Semitic incursion from the Chaldees forced them back upon the region of Thebes. They were the descendants of Japhet, who had brought with them from the highlands of Ayriana<sup>2</sup> the tradition of Noah concerning the renewal of the race through a Mediator from on high. Later, the *Neb*, *Hor-em-chu*, the symbol of the '*Rising*,' and Anu,<sup>3</sup> the old god of the Chaldees, were confused, and the one substituted for the other. Creeds suffer through

<sup>1</sup> The Promise of Paradise.

<sup>2</sup> Eran; the "Land of the Pure"; the cradle of the Aryan family of nations, comprising Armenia, Media and Persia.

<sup>3</sup> An or Anu was originally the name of *Noah* among the Chaldeans.

constant wear, like coins, unless they be re-stamped from time to time with the image of the king. Even words wear out, and are cast aside: a sure proof of the inconsistency and restlessness of the mind of man. The creed which will stand through the vicissitudes of contentions and persecutions, is heaven-born. So far only one ray of Heaven has been universally retained: the assurance that the Savior will come. We have seen Him, Rufus; may He dispel the darkness of superstition!"

"Where may He be? Ye left Bethlehem so secretly, that Herod and I were very much astonished; especially, however, Herod. He sent a courier after me; dost think, he did not search for the Child, and make away with Him?"

"Nay, friend Rufus; for the Child is in Egypt."

Rufus stopped his mule. "And—and—hast seen Him?" he succeeded in sputtering after several attempts at formulating a respectful question.

"And I am leading thee to His refuge."

A few more paces, and they halted at the gate of a small garden. "Go in," Melchior encouraged his companion, who had suddenly become very serious, composed, and almost timid;

“I shall procure in the city what may be needful for their comfort.”

Melchior turned about, and Rufus, scratching his head and looking himself over with great care, proceeded towards the sacred threshold, where his God had entered. At the side of the house, he tied his pesky mule, to keep it from sampling the luscious vegetables of the garden. Then he removed his military cap, and stepped through the door, so humble and devout a man, that no one would have suspected him of having again sworn by *Hercules*, and of having made the Greek slave drunk at the inn of Gaza.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BRIDE OF THE KING

King Mensor was dead. His demise had occurred during the absence of his son Marut, under circumstances which warranted the suspicion of violence. The eldest son Deva had assumed the crown, and had enlisted in his cause the services of the Parthian generals, before the nobles and the priests had finished their deliberations over the selection of a new king. Had Marut remained at home, and had Nizra consented to be their queen at his side, the priests, at least, would not have hesitated to espouse his cause. But if he returned as the husband of Caspar's daughter, he would assuredly raise the standard of revolt, and plunge the country into civil war, as many aspirants to the throne had done before him. And if he had not succeeded in making Nizra his wife, his fate was decreed: the new king would either kill or banish him.

These apprehensions were in part the cause of the gloom and silence that had received the

pilgrims on their return at the city gates. Another cause was the accusation of treason to the gods, spread broadcast over the capital and over the country by the priests and sages. This cause had affected the feeling of the people more than the former, as they thought more of their religion than of their king. The priests in astutely playing upon the religious sentiment against the two sages, Caspar and Balthassar, whose courage they had accounted a challenge of their own apathy, and a vain boast, had not been prepared to witness so deep an agitation as that which stirred the very dregs of the population, consisting of immigrants from Babylon and Nineveh, from Susae, and from the banks of the Indus; pagans, Jews, Buddhists, and devil-worshippers.<sup>1</sup> It was these foreign and irresponsible elements that had soon carried the surging tide of fanaticism over the heads of the more sensible native population.

Marut had been condemned to exile before he had returned. His appointment to the satrapy of Parsa, the antique capital and the cradle of the Persians, had been delivered to him at the portal of the royal palace, and with it had been given a silent hint that he was not desired to express his loyalty to the new

<sup>1</sup> Compare: *Doellinger, Judenthum und Heidenthum*, p. 256, et al.

occupant of his father's throne otherwise, than by speedy obedience.

He had held interviews with the nobles and the priests; he had harangued the people in the streets and in the temple; but the priests had repudiated him with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders; the nobles had perfunctorily assured him of their sympathy with his misfortune; and the people had jeered at him, and had laughed to scorn his pleadings for their support.

"Couldst not even press thy suit to an issue with a girl," someone shouted at him in the temple; "how wouldst sway the minds of thousands!" "Soft nest for such tender birds as thou and the priest's daughter, in Parsa," another had railed; and still another: "Go, serve a vassal to the newborn King of the Jews!"

Marut had sought Caspar and Nizra. They knew the sentiment of both public and palace. They had admitted him into their house for refuge. But when one day he set foot on the threshold once more to go forth on his errand of soliciting the favor of his former friends and admirers, he met the minions of Deva with the bridal gifts of the new king in their hands: a diadem, a crimson robe, a jeweled girdle, a beautiful golden chain, and a pair of

dainty slippers, made of the finest of white silk, and ornamented with gold and precious stones.

Mirza<sup>1</sup> Deva was far bolder in his wooing than his more discreet brother Marut; Nizra would not refuse to become the bride of the king!

This conjunction of events, the priests had been fearing. Deva would make overtures to the fastidious Nizra, and win her from her ardent lover; Marut would resent the cruel encroachment upon his affection, and conjure up the grim specter of civil war.

If Nizra, however, accepted the advances of the king, and at the same time, declined to assist at the sacrifices to the gods of the country, the chances of Marut's success with the people and the priests, would yet be much enhanced.

At Caspar's door, as Marut stepped out, a courtier, a Parthian captain, intercepted him, displaying two daggers, exactly alike. One of them he offered to Marut, and deliberately returned the other to its scabbard on his belt. Marut took the dagger to read the legend traced on its gleaming blade; it read: "*I or my brother.*" The meaning was plain: "If thou dost not obey, thou art doomed; either kill thyself, or thou shalt be killed."

<sup>1</sup> "Son of the Prince," an official title.

Without saying a word, Marut returned with the king's messengers into Caspar's house. Nizra saw the cold steel gleaming in his hand, and shuddered. He placed himself before her, and offered her the hilt of the weapon: "Accept me, Nizra," he pleaded, "or drive this into my heart!"

Nizra's hand trembled; but she courageously clutched the cruel instrument of death—and threw it out of the window. The leader of the bridal embassy bade Marut stand aside. But he sprang forward, threw his arms about Nizra, and, in the twinkling of an eye, bore her to an open window, and was about to spring down with her, when the courtiers grasped him, tore Nizra from his arms, and pitched him down headlong to the pavement. A shout of joy arose above the heads of the curious multitude in the streets, and a moment later, the gate of Caspar's court was forced, and some desperate Buddhistic fanatics entered to vent their ire on the "adorer of the King of the Jews!" But they were driven back with cudgels by the servants of Caspar. "He is the king's son," they warned the panting brutes; "his body is not to be desecrated by violence!" They took up the apparently lifeless form and conveyed it into the house.

Nizra was prostrated. But the mission of the



courtiers could not be carried out after this terrible scene. They humbly and reverently laid down the gifts of the king at her feet, and departed. She did not make the slightest acknowledgment of the singular favor of the new ruler; she just wept and sobbed on the bosom of her father.

Marut was not dead, but so seriously injured, that he could not live. Caspar had him placed on a bed, and watched over him. Towards evening, the dying youth regained consciousness. "Nizra!" he sighed; his life was fast ebbing away.

Nizra had taken up her position at the head of the bed, and now bent her anxious face over him. He made an effort to raise his arms, but failed. A faint smile of regret, a look of unspeakable affection, appeared in his eyes. "Thou shalt be my bride in heaven—the King of the Jews—" he whispered, and would evidently say more; but a stream of blood poured over his lips, and drowned his profession of faith, made at the gates of Eternity.

Nizra was overjoyed at this sign of his conversion from the stubborn resistance which he had made to all the graceful advances of divine truth, and laid her hands to his face, to raise his head, and thus to ease his sufferings. —"Is my God!" Marut continued abruptly,

when the fateful hemorrhage ceased. It was his last breath.

In the night, his body was removed by the order of the king, and was buried at the side of his father.

\* \* \* \* \*

A week after this event, the king sent twelve maidens of the court to Caspar's house.

"We are come to vest thee with the garments of the queen," they announced to Nizra. The day before, Caspar had received a written message from the king, that he was appointed governor of Parsa, in place of Marut. Caspar had not acknowledged the royal favor. This new attempt at making his daughter queen both against his and her own will, was a signal for Caspar to act.

He kindly requested the king's maids to make ready the queenly robes, and took Nizra aside. "My child," he began with deep emotion, "the day of thy trial is at hand. So far, the king has wooed thee with soft pressure; hereafter, if we again turn from him, he will employ rude force. I should not deem it strange, should he appear in person to-morrow in his chariot, and have thee borne out of thy house on the arms of his officers, and have thee seated at his side, to let the people shout their salute at thee. He knows that his throne is not

safe either without thee for his wife, or with thee, a renegade from the faith of his fathers: Nizra, thou mayest not choose between him and a lover; but thou *must* choose between him and God!"

But Caspar's doubts of her firmness, if he had entertained any for a brief moment of distress, were instantly dispelled, when Nizra raised her sparkling eyes to his earnest face. "I have already made my choice," she replied joyfully, "and I have made it irrevocably. I am espoused to the Savior, the Immortal King of heaven and earth; to Him I have consecrated my life. I will neither prince nor king for husband; thee for my love, and God for my prize! Come, let them vest me for the sacrifice!"

She knelt down, and Caspar laid both his hands in benediction upon her head. Then, "Arise, child of my heart," he said with exultant voice, and clasped her once more to his breast; "thou art about to be made the 'Sister of the King'—" "And, please God, 'the Bride of the Prince of Peace,' " Nizra added, and returned to the chamber where the bridesmaids were impatiently awaiting her.

Nizra most gracefully submitted to the ceremonies of the vesting. The bright crimson robe, bordered, laced and bespangled with gold, and its clasp set with rubies and amethysts,

only heightened the simplicity and purity of her plain white gown; she disdained the offer of the precious cincture which was too broad to be to her liking, as it would too plainly set off the lines of the maidenly figure; but she openly admired the bridal ring, an artistically wrought circlet of golden threads, set with an opal of mysteriously deep and tearful gleam, as a pledge of the sacrificial character of her nuptials; and she bowed her head demurely to receive the splendid diadem which shed a queenly grace upon her brow. When she sat down to allow the admiring maids to put on her feet the bridal slippers, mere pockets of white silk to furnish a delicate ground for the golden filigree and the sparkling jewelry, she paid her compliment to the exquisite taste of her resolute wooer.

"Truly fit," she jested, "to grace the foot of an angel of Paradise!"

The maids had from time to time anxiously peered out upon the street. Now the cause of their anxiety became apparent: Nizra had lost some time in the solemn conference held with her father, and her cheerful comments on the deftness of the maidens as well as on the good taste of Deva, had protracted the ceremony not a little. They had been afraid that the royal chariot, which now approached, might arrive

before the bride would be vested. The king had given strict command not to tarry after the chariot arrived at the house.

The bridal chariot was drawn by three white horses hitched abreast, and was surrounded by a guard of honor on horseback. The canopy erected on the car of state was arranged in such a manner, that its innumerable ribs and folds of silver-bespangled snowy silk ran down on three sides from a star-shaped center above, leaving the front open, except for a double curtain of the same material, gathered in at either side from the middle to the bottom. It was surmounted by a crown of white roses, the favorite flower of the Parsa, their emblem of purity and of love. Its sides also were wreathed all about with rich garlands of roses and delicate leaves, and were strung with tassels and pendants of silver.

As soon as the bridal car stopped at Caspar's door, the guard dismounted, and two of the princely conductors assisted two maidens in stepping down from the magnificent silken bower. At the same time Nizra appeared at the door of her house in the midst of the bridesmaids, and slowly descended the steps, without raising her eyes, despite the vociferous salutations of the curious multitude in the wake of the king's car.

The two maidens who had awaited Nizra, assisted her into her seat under the canopy, and then joined the bridesmaids, forming with them a circle about the car. The attendants bowed low seven times towards her. Then, at a word from their captain, they rode forward and headed the beautiful procession towards the palace.

Nizra was apparently calm, but exceedingly pale. Her eyelashes trembled, her lips quivered a little, and her hands, as delicate as white wax, lay clasped in her lap. But her gaze was riveted to the floor of the car.

Her father followed at a distance on foot. His venerable figure was bent, his step was uncertain, and tears glistened in the corners of his eyes. No one of the noisy throng took notice of his changed appearance; the "Bride of the King" was the momentary center of attraction, and multitudes do not think beyond the moment.

At the court, the priests and the nobles were assembled around the king. The summary wooing of the youthful sovereign had inspired them the more with confidence in his future decision and resoluteness, as the object of his daring, the elevation of the beloved daughter of Caspar to the place of honor at his side, was also their heart's desire.

But at the entrance of the council chamber, Nizra waited for the arrival of her father, and would not move another step, until Caspar drew near, and taking her cold, trembling hand, conducted her to the steps of the throne. She felt not secure alone.

The king arose to greet her, and extended his arms to receive her. But at the foot of the throne, she remained still and silent. "Go up," her father whispered; "God is with thee!" Then she raised her eyes to Deva, and lightly stepped forward to the platform of the throne. She allowed the king to embrace and kiss her, but did not return the greeting. Her refusal was put to the account of her embarrassment.

She was now, to all intents of law and custom, the spouse of the King of the Parsa. But the ceremony was not considered complete, before both king and queen had made their offering in the temple of Mithra and had sealed their union with an oath before Mithra's altar, and also with the participation of the sacramental cup of the Haoma.

Hence, the next morning the royal procession was conducted to the temple by the priests and all the nobles of princely rank, who were to be the witnesses and sponsors of the marriage.

Part of the morning, Nizra had been in the

care of the priests to be instructed in the rites which were to be observed at the public celebration; from the hands of the priests she was passed into the arms of her father.

"Hast kept thy resolve?" was Caspar's first query.

"Ay, father," she answered, but without her wonted warmth. Her seeming embarrassment alarmed Caspar.

"They have not won thee back to their superstition?" he pressed her with much concern.

"I am faint from fear, dear father mine," she sobbed, and cast herself on his breast.

"It is but natural that the heart should quake in the face of so awful a sacrifice!"

"But is there no shadow of doubt that I shall not cast away my young life for a dream? Was *He* spared, for whose love I have entered upon this terrible ordeal? If He has not escaped the sword of Herod, all our sufferings have been borne in vain!"

Oh, these anxieties of the soul before the combat! What a hard-won crown is the crown of victory in a contest between assertive self and an invisible God!

But Caspar had not expected that she would go to her death for her obedience to the call of heavenly truth without temptation. He allowed her to sob out her apprehensions on his



bosom; it was rather the sense of helplessness in the face of death than deep-rooted doubt, he thought, that unnerved her at the opening of the battle. Her next question, which he would neither suggest nor solicit, would be the fruit of her true mind.

And his confidence in his daughter's firmness, resting on the intimate knowledge of her brave and noble heart, was again vindicated.

"If *He* should have perished," she began anew after a long pause of deep speculation, "still, the traces of Him and His coming, which we have found in the teachings of antiquity, and even in the superstitious disfigurements of the legends and worship of the present, cannot fail to lead back to Heaven as His origin, and, forward to His day of triumph. His sacrifice may have been destined to be completed in His infancy. Do not the legends tell of a god-child, who shall save His brethren by His own destruction,<sup>1</sup> and then reappear in glory to avenge the pride of His enemies?"

Caspar inwardly applauded her firmness which would not yield a conviction once thoroughly established. He entered heartily upon the new course of her thoughts, and, "If that has been fulfilled," he urged, "which was fore-

<sup>1</sup> Various legends of Oriental Antiquity; v. g., the legend of the "Child and the Lotus" in India and in China.

told of His coming and His birth, rest thee upon His word, that this also which fore-shadows His sacrifice and His triumph, shall not fail to come about.”

But Caspar's own heart was as much oppressed as Nizra's. He hardly felt strong enough to assist at the nuptial rites in the temple, where the crisis would begin with the sacrifice to Mithra. After a long and fervent embrace, he handed his daughter over to the maidens who were to give her conduct of honor to the temple. The heralds of the king had already sounded the signal for the beginning of the feast day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Note:* To facilitate the understanding of the following chapters, it may be wise to note: (1) That the influence of Brahmanism and Buddhism, imported from India, the worship of Mithra, and of the Assyrian Anahit, had strongly tainted the originally pure religion of the Persians; (2) That in the *northern* provinces, the old faith still exerted much greater power over the minds than in the southern parts, which were constantly exposed to foreign influences; (3) That Persia at that time, although under the rule of native tribal kings, still was only a province of the mighty Parthian Empire, and that the Parthian Emperors were at the mercy of Rome, which furthered all manner of intrigue at the Parthian court, and insisted on educating its princes.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SACRILEGE

The first part of the ordeal, the sacrifice to Mithra, was over. The king had manifested some concern over his bride's blank refusal to accept the holy water sprinkler from the priest's hand, and to besprinkle the idol, as was the custom of the ceremony. But the officiating priest, himself a Parsa, and carrying out the Buddhistic appendage to the ritual only as a matter of routine, had smiled at the self-possessed young queen, and passed on to the oath. But although Deva pronounced every word of it with a heart rejoicing over the acquisition of so timid, as he thought, and so sweet a bride, yet Nizra repeated never a word. Still, as also this part of the ceremony was enacted before the public altar of Mithra, whose worship had only recently crept in upon the Persians, and whose statue they would be the first to dethrone, if the foreign priests did not enjoy the protection of the Persian laws, the *Magha* made light of the insult to the "false god."

The majority of the priests had preceded the bridal pair into the secret chapel of the temple. Whatever ceremony was performed before they had partaken of the sacred Haoma,<sup>1</sup> was not considered as binding by the disciples of Zarathustra.

This part of the nuptial ceremony of the Parsa was held to have the nature of a sacrament.

Hither Caspar followed his daughter with tottering steps.

The archpriest, vested in his sacred robes, and adorned with the priestly tiara, turned from the altar, and Nizra looked up at his solemn face with strangely lustrous eyes, so that he could scarcely conceal his admiration. He bore in his hand a golden cup which was filled with a yellowish liquid substance, the Haoma, the juice of the Haoma-herb.<sup>2</sup>

It represented the life-giving food, which, sanctified by God in the dark ages of the past, was to impart the blessing of immortality, not of the body, but of the spirit, and to insure a future resurrection.

The king sipped a drop from the sacred cup, and passed it to Nizra. But Nizra shook her

<sup>1</sup> A sacrifice of the Aryan race; of great antiquity.

<sup>2</sup> In the various Oriental countries, various plants, according to various climes, were used for this sacrifice.

head. The king urged and pressed her, not to disgrace him before the priests and his nobles, the pillars of his reign, and not to despise the ancient faith of the fathers; but she declined, gently, but firmly. Deva laid his cheek against her face, and most earnestly entreated her, at least not to despise his love; but Nizra only glanced at him with a smile of pity, and refused. Then the king stepped back from the altar in anger and confusion, and cried hoarsely: "She has denied our god—I will not wed her!" and left the temple with his courtiers.

The Magha<sup>1</sup> dashed the rejected cup on the altar, and tore the tiara from his head; the assistant priests laid hands on Nizra and pushed her out of the Sanctuary. At the gate she was received by the henchmen of the king, and hurried off to prison, in bonds, divested of her queenly attire, and without being permitted to exchange a word of congratulation with her father.

But Caspar was also taken into custody, and reserved for trial on a charge of treason.

The whole city was in an uproar. Word had been given out that Nizra spat in the sacred cup, and that she profaned the altar of Mithra

<sup>1</sup> The Persian title of a priest, meaning the same as the Latin *Magnus* (great).

by uttering blasphemies against it.—*Fama crescit eundo!*—<sup>1</sup> The iron was hot enough to bend to any shape; the fanatical enemies of Caspar's new faith, which they would have spared, if his daughter had denied it, kept on fanning the flames by insinuations of darker sins even than blasphemy laid to the charge of Nizra, "the worthless spouse of the unhappy king."

She was to be taken into judgment after three days, which they allowed her for a change of heart.

But after the mind of the populace had turned to the hatred of her, not for her faith, but for her imputed lack of virtue—a charge which hurt her to the quick, when the jailer flung it into her face—Nizra's fate was decreed, no matter what change of heart she might undergo.—The king had gained the sympathy of the rabble; what cared he now for Nizra, or Nizra's good name? Are not kings raised above the ordinary requirements of what the drudging masses ignorantly call Morality?—Nizra had lost her game; who should interest himself in her fate? There was neither priest nor prince of sufficient nobility of heart to consider that, even if her religious convictions should be false, they were at least honest

<sup>1</sup> "Rumor grows a-running."

enough to be defended with the sacrifice of a throne and of a young and easy life, and to merit for her the sympathy of the pious and the assistance of the brave: for Truth alone gives the courage of sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WAYS OF MAN

The morning of the day set aside for the judgment of the unfortunate bride of King Deva was ushered in by a deep blushing dawn, which broke in a myriad purple streaks at the moment of sunrise. The spectators who had gathered early in the wide approach of the temple had exchanged whispered comments on the ominous, blood-like appearance of the sky before the sun had broken through the crimson veil; "for 'the blush of morn is the death of day,' " they agreed.<sup>1</sup>

And indeed their solemn mood was not without reason. In the middle of the spacious area which lay like a carpet of stone spread out before the gates of the temple, the "Wheel" was erected, that instrument of torture and death, which was reserved for the punishment of the most atrocious crimes. It was built of wood, and consisted of a heavy, rudely joined hoop, of the diameter of a man's height, and of four spokes, which were in reality nothing but the

<sup>1</sup> *"Roethe am Morgen  
Bringt Kummer und Sorgen."*



transversely joined beams of a cross. The hoop served a double purpose: it mitigated the grim aspect of the naked cross, and by means of its revolving, the obstinate victim could be subjected to renewed pain and torment with every turn, and could thus be forced to confess to the executioner, what he would conceal from the judge. The crude structure was erected on a large, elevated platform, and was painted a dull red, probably to blend more readily with the color of the blood, which it was expected, would soon stain its cruel arms.

The tribunal was built in the shadow of the temple porch; an elevated seat for the judge, and several tiers of temporarily constructed benches covered with white cloth. The principal seat alone was decorated with a crimson canopy, the back of which was formed of a tiger's skin; for the king himself would this day sit in judgment. The case was one of the gravest affairs of justice ever taken in hand by a judge in the capital. A charge of high-treason, involved in the charge of impiety or lapse from the worship of the land, was to be passed upon, against a woman, the daughter of one of the most ancient and most honorable noble houses of the land of the Parsa.

The popular charge of Nizra's practicing the most wicked deceit against her royal lord, the

judges had agreed in council with the king, should not be pressed. It could not be proved; and it would be inhuman to force the maiden on the rack to confess herself guilty of a crime, which the loose tongue of rumor alone had fastened on her, and which her judges knew to be a calumny hatched out by the sycophants of the palace with a view to covering the defeat of the king.

A little after sunrise, the royal party approached in state, and were seated in the porch. One of the priests, at a signal from the king's hand, began to beat, slowly, and at long, measured intervals, the silver gong in use at the solemn functions of the temple. At the third beat, which sounded graver, as with a wail of anguish, because the priest had struck the rim of the instrument in his excitement, the procession of the poor victim of the law turned the corner of the opposite street, and Nizra came into view, clad in a simple gown of white linen, which was worn without cincture, and was hemmed only at the bottom and at the ends of the sleeves with a narrow band of silver braid. It was the gown which she usually wore at home.

Her gait was slow and firm; her hands were tied with ropes behind her back, and a rope was laid around her neck, by which one of the hang-

men was leading her. Her down-cast eyes were quiet, like those of a child asleep; her carriage was modest and humble with the air of one welcoming an inevitable doom. Her father was at her side, bound as she was, but with his hands tied in front; humble, as she was; but not erect. Caspar's cheeks were wet with tears, and his burning eyes mirrored the agony of his soul. Now and then he cast an awe-struck, half-hearted, sidelong glance at her; but she moved on, quietly, dreamily, yet without faltering in a step; she divined her father's suffering, she felt it; she sympathized with him—and, therefore, was afraid to expose her courage to defeat at the hands of her filial devotion: she did not return his glances of timid, helpless affection.

Dying is an experience to make only once in life, and the bravest shrink from a combat in which the opponent is already crowned with the wreath of victory; death by violence, death at the hands of those who should minister consolation, offer sympathy, and shield an imperiled brother with their love, is doubly repulsive, for the leaguings of hostility with its native grimness. Its victim then is ravished, not only without defense, but even without comfort; he is about to plunge into an unknown, dreaded

world, and finds no friendly hand to clasp, to stay his trust in a new love with the assurance of love's watch over his exit.

Caspar and Nizra experienced the cutting coldness of being alone. A thousand faces were gathered about them; but was there *one* of pity? *One* of sympathy? *One* of love? Nay; faces full of interest and curiosity, full of admiration, full of eagerness, and full of expectation of the contest of a child, unused to rudeness even, with armed and grim-visaged death; but of gentleness and friendliness, there was no trace in a thousand faces. The white-haired old man, a way-worn traveler at the goal of his hard journey, at the side of life's prettiest and tenderest embodiment, gazed about over the ring of cold curiosity, and trembled. One more furtive glance at the quiet, silent figure of his child, and his head is raised, the fire-brands in his eyes begin to flicker, and, in an instant, are burnt down. The rigor of his lips relaxed, and Nizra felt the warming hand of her father gently creeping into her own, and pressing it affectionately. "It is well, father," she answered the mute inquiry; "let us not fear death; we shall be reunited beyond!"

When they arrived before the judgment seat, Nizra's hands were untied. The king opened

the hearing, as he would conduct the trial in person. He addressed himself to the weaker victim.

“Nizra,” he began solemnly amid deathly stillness, “Nizra, daughter of the Parsa: thou didst deny the gods of thy fathers; hast repented?”

No answer.

“Give answer to thy king—and thy husband! Thou shalt be forgiven, if thou dost repent!”

No answer.

The king had not spoken unkindly; but at the persistent refusal, his eyes lit up with the flare of fury.

“Hast repented?” he repeated with a deep, angry, stifled voice.

But there was no sound, save the dread echo of the king’s menacing word.

The long pause which ensued upon the defiance of the accused maiden, rendered the oppression of the scene tangible. At last Nizra quietly raised her head towards the king. “I am not so strong” she replied, “as that I should dare to contend against a king. I fear to offer my faith as a prize in contest. It is not disrespect to the king, that has made me silent, but apprehension, lest I lose my treasure by exposing it to contention.”

“Then thou art stubborn, girl? Thou hast

not repented—?” But after a moment of consideration, he changed his aggressive tone to sympathy. Had she not herself betrayed the weakest point in her defense? Argue with her, and she shall surely fail!—

“What knowest of an unknown God?” he resumed; “are not all these people, and I, as pious as thou and thy father: and have we been deluded into seeking a strange God abroad, who may not know of us? Speak, Nizra; answer me: Wilt cast away thy life for a senseless affection towards a child born among the Jews, when thou couldst thyself bear children, to lavish thy love upon? And was He not killed? I have message from the West, that the King of the Jews is dead.”<sup>1</sup>

“Even if He be dead, His Father lives, whom ye know not,” Nizra replied, without looking up.

“Hast seen His Father?”

“I have not!”

“How then knowest that He lives?”

“Hast seen the Star of the East, O king? Who, thinkest, set it in the firmament: He, from whose bosom the Child of the Star is come down to earth, or the Child Himself?”

“How knowest that it was a magic star to announce the bending down of Heaven in the

<sup>1</sup> By that time, *Herod* had died.

advent of that Child! Prove thy supposition, girl, and then we will hear thee! The appearance of that luminary at the time of His birth was a mere coincidence; the erratic flare of a comet, or of some other lost wanderer of the firmament!"

"But, know thou, O king, that the Star deserted us," Nizra explained with great animation, "at the boundary of the Jewish kingdom of old, and reappeared at Jerusalem, and conducted us to the very door of His abode: a comet, indeed, gifted with superior knowledge; for the Jews even knew not where He dwelled at that time! Their Magi<sup>1</sup> were obliged to consult the books of their ancient prophets in order to establish the birthplace of the *Sosiosh*,<sup>2</sup> when their king demanded of them an account of our search after the mysterious Child: and their prophet names Bethlehem the city of His birth. He, therefore, who had of old enlightened the vision of the holy seer, latterly also guided the herald of His Son in the sky; hence both the prediction of the prophet and the mission of that Star were derived from the same source, the Providence of the Father-God in Heaven. The Star of the East, O king, was no lost wanderer of the firmament, but a messenger of the Most High."

<sup>1</sup> The scribes.

<sup>2</sup> The Savior.

The king manifested growing uneasiness. He nervously ran his fingers through the curls and ringlets of his beard while he was intently observing her, bent upon detecting a flaw in her deductions.

The wise men watched him with mistrustful eyes. The courtiers alone appeared to relish the sight of the skilful and courageous disputant, who stood before the tribunal with her kindled enthusiasm visible in the flush of her face, in the light of her eyes, and her fine figure gracefully poised in the attitude of a cherub-warrior.

She was waiting for a reply. The dread of exposing her faith to risk in contest with the king, had made room for the evident desire to profess and defend it at any cost, and to the joy of security won in defending the unquestionable cause of truth. There was no trace of arrogance in her soft voice, and no trace of pride in her easy pose. Her enthusiasm was that of a child over a victory at play, and her courage, that of an angel doing the irrevocable bidding of the Almighty.

The low mutterings of the throng of spectators in the background also seemed to bear the tone of approval; but they were checked out of respect for the king.



At last king Deva snarled: "Proceed!"—His cause was lost!

With a distressingly unkind and contemptuous smile the courtiers turned their cold stare upon Deva; he could not press his objection; he could not raise a new barrier to the triumphant progress of the champion of the new God!

Nizra resumed pleasantly:

"His Father lives and reigns in the never-fading glory of His Heaven. But He lives and reigns likewise in the heart of those who love and adore Him; and He will live in thee also, O king, if thou wilt hearken to His voice, and wilt forswear the worship of idols—and of thyself!"

"Stop!" the king angrily cried at her; "I will not have a woman teach me! What the wise men of the earth dare not—teach a king the ways of God<sup>1</sup>—thou darest, audacious prater, blasphemer though thou be proved, dishonored bride, and disgraced consort of thy king?"

Deva in his anger arose from his seat, and stepped down on the platform so as to place himself close in front of Nizra.

<sup>1</sup> The kings of the Persians and of the Medes (see Daniel vi. 12) were believed to participate, to a certain extent, in the power and wisdom of God.

“Deny Him,” he continued, his wrath growing with every breath; “curse Him; cast His memory forth from thy heart! Thy new god is a blight upon the joy of the earth, a *deva*<sup>1</sup> of darkness come forth from the regions of everlasting horror to enslave the freeborn children of Mithra!—Deny Him—or die!”

But Nizra was not moved by the vehement storm bursting over her head; she quietly replied:

“Art not thou also named *Deva*, O king?—Our fathers in the beginning called the Creator ‘the Light,’ for lack of a term coined and current; but ye have come to call the light ‘God,’ and to attribute to the work of His hands the glory of the Maker. Our early fathers in common with the neighboring Hindus, our brethren in race, named the servants of the Creator, who assist at His throne, *deva*; now the Parsa have come to look upon the *deva* as spirits of darkness, whereas the Hindus continue to venerate them as spirits of light. Hostility sprang up between the brother-nations when they separated over a division in their belief. Our own ancestors long retained the true conception of the divine Author of the world after our neigh-

<sup>1</sup> *Deva* among the Persians means an evil spirit; with the Hindu Brahmins it signifies a good spirit, being derived from the Aryan *Diu*, Light.—The naming of prince Deva was a concession made to Brahmanism.

bors yielded their treasure of truth to the ranting Brahmans and Bonzes.— Thy own father, O king, because of his uprightness of life, never found cause to forsake the old faith and to embrace the idolatry of Mithra's cult—!"

Nizra's onslaught against the popular errors was suddenly interrupted by a shout from the groups of spectators about her. The bold allusion to the emptiness of Brahmanism and Buddhism, and to the "idolatry" of Mithra, the favored modern god, had exasperated the devotees of the misused creeds, and the advocates of an easier morality, the code of Mithra.

"The Wheel!"—"Away with her!" and such like threats and outbursts of hostility were distinctly heard over the confused growling and cursing of the disquieted masses.

The time was come for the king to recover his lost laurels, lest the populace might bethink themselves also of his failure to defeat the valiant maiden, and cast him off after they should have satisfied their demand for the blood of the fair blasphemer. Already his assumed ferocity seemed but the mask of his insecurity. The priests and the other princely attendants noticed his uneasiness; but he also could interpret without mistake the expression of uncomfortable sympathy in the faces of the priests,

and that of haughty derision in the faces of his courtiers and captains.

This experience deprived him of the last vestige of self-possession.

“Blasphemer!” he shouted at his frail opponent, stretching out his clenched fists toward her; “thy God in swaddling clothes is a stranger in His own land, unknown and unsought, as the companions of thy foolish search have related to us; His own people have stolen Him away from the sight of the public; His own priests have neglected, nay, disowned Him: a God, forsooth, to move a girl to tears, but to fill a man with scorn!—Wilt forswear Him?” And he raised his right hand threateningly over her.

“I would forswear myself, would I forswear my God!” Nizra replied fearlessly; “it is not for the honor of truth, but for the possessing of a compliant idol, which sanctions the evil leanings of the flesh, that thou, O king, contendest against the Heavenly Light which was heralded by the Star of the East. The God of Heaven is the God of Love and Peace; but the God also—mark me, *Deval*—of Purity and Justice. He shall establish His throne over the heads of the kings of earth; He shall in lowliness our brother be, and yet remain our Lord and Master in undimmed majesty.

“Such is the God whom I adore in the Child of Bethlehem! God, descended in the form of man, as the Sun, enveloped in his purple robes of the morning clouds!”

At the last words, she pointed to the sun, whose brilliant darts were suddenly broken and dimmed by a shadowy haze. All eyes followed the motion of her hand, even her father's; her eloquence had enraptured her hearers, and the quickly growing weird somberness of the sky added to their rapture the fear of a warning from her exalted God. The pale, bluish sheen, which had silvered the nights when the Star of the East was beaming down upon their heads, was again perceptibly falling over the land, turning the heat and glare of a summer's day into the cool, brooding atmosphere of an autumnal evening. They failed not to recognize the coincidence, and huddled together, as much from terror as from the sensitive cold of the air.—If only this delicate matter were settled!

She had blasphemed; she had repeated in public, and emphasized, the insult to their gods, which she had committed in the secret sanctuary of the temple. There she had shown like disrespect to Mithra and the Haoma; the priests had been divided in their views of her action according to the difference of their re-

ligious preferences. Buddhism was for the time being the acknowledged religion of more than half the land; but also Brahma had many secret worshipers among both priests and people, and Brahma and Buddha were worshiped together by many others, who thus compromised with the law, without injuring their conscience. But she had denied both the national gods and the national sacrifice, and had boldly set up a new God over them. The crisis was inevitable.

The tense looks of the entire assembly were now concentrated on the king. The argument and the protestation of Nizra were not deemed worthy of notice. What the king would say, do, or decide, was the only question of moment. But the king was furious over his defeat.

The solemn aspect of the sky and the chill in the atmosphere were fully in accord with the universal sentiment of expectation and dread; in a moment, the terror of the unnatural had passed; the unheard-of audacity of a maiden, to fling the charge of superstition into the face of the whole population and its princes and leaders, was a far more interesting phenomenon than a change in the aspect of the heavens.

Caspar had again sought Nizra's hand. His touch was no longer warm and gentle; it was feverishly hot, hearty and cheering. "He

lives," he whispered stealthily; "and He stands awaiting thee!"

"At the Wheel!" she responded, faltering a little.

She had seen the terrible machine. She had glanced at it but once, as they passed it in the procession across the wide road. The sight of it had sent a thrill of horror through her soul. Even now the thought of it threatened to unnerve her; it was so hard to die.

The king made ready to reply to her challenge. Casting his flashing eyes round at the troubled faces, his brow knit and dark, his lips quivering, and his hands shaking with the tumult of his rage, he roared and bellowed out his protest against Nizra's treason with the voice of a maddened bull. At first, little of his speech was understood; it was incoherent, and his voice was so much overstrained, that it snapped and broke at every new effort of infusing the wrath of his bosom into his vehement exclamations. But gradually it gathered in a rushing, swirling, foaming torrent of the most violent invective. His oratorical abilities were not mean. The names of his "illustrious ancestors, who had shed their blood in defense of the holy heritage," together with the names of the successive deities, which "had benignly presided over the destinies of the god-fearing

nation of the Parsa," the names of sages and seers, "who observed the stupendous mechanism of the heavens, and read therein the designs of the gods," and the names of the "heroes of the Parsa, who had offered life and substance on the altar of patriotism"—the commonplaces of every demagogue from the devil down to Deva—were snapped out, thundered out, hurled and flung in a magnificent storm of unbridled frenzy, like the mighty display of the rattling artillery of the fire-riven clouds of night. "And now," he continued, pointing his trembling hand at Nizra, who was watching him as innocently as a child might have watched his frantic gesticulation, "and now our gods are bidden to prostrate themselves before this precocious teacher, this prophetess of a helpless, dead god, this traitoress to the nation and to the king! A Semitic deity, imported into the land of the Jews from Babel,<sup>1</sup> a stranger to the race of Japhet, an unreasonable exactor of the slavish service of man without reserve of his most sacred privileges, a very Moloch of blood-thirstiness, is to reign supreme over the free-born Parsa, who own not allegiance, but kinship with the Ruler of the World! Ye shall cast off your children<sup>2</sup> for a sacrifice to him!

<sup>1</sup> An old slander.

<sup>2</sup> The children of Bethlehem, killed at Herod's order.



Ye shall send your young daughters out into the solitude of the mountains, and lock up your sons in your houses, lest they seek and love each other! The earth is to be laid waste, the race of men is to be stamped out, to prepare the reign of the new god and his ministers over such effete virginity <sup>1</sup> as is vaunted by this votary of a diapered <sup>2</sup> son of heaven!"

The king had nicely rated the religious vein of his hearers. At the instant that he stopped, a unanimous cry arose like a peal of thunder out of the enraged masses: "To the Wheel with her! To the Wheel!"

The ordeal was over; the gates of life were fast closing behind Nizra; there was no returning from the way to the grave. She had already conquered, as she had dreaded the danger of her conflict with the tempter of her faith more than that of her conflict with death. Her death-struggle on the Wheel might be pro-

<sup>1</sup> A malicious misconception of the prophecy and tradition of the virgin birth of the Savior.

<sup>2</sup> A fling at the meekness of His infancy. An example of such confusion of religious ideas at that period of Persian history is found in the life of Darius, who, out of zeal for his own faith, that of Zoroaster's reformation, which at bottom was opposed to idolatry, first killed the sacred bull of the Egyptians at Heliopolis, and afterwards, repenting of his rashness, offered a sacrifice in honor of the beastly god. The exchange of gods and tenets between nations at that time had wrought a hopeless confusion in the faith and worship of the whole civilized world. But the worship of Mithra had not gained vogue among the Persians until about seventy years before Christ.

longed to the duration of two long days and nights, amid the jeers and abuse of the fanatical rabble; but they could not tempt her more from her love and devotion. She would close her eyes, and let them revile her, and patiently await the fatal embrace of the grim deliverer from all the ills of earth. With these reflections she busied herself while the hangmen were carrying her to the place of execution. They had taken the ropes from her hands and her neck, and as soon as they had arrived on the platform, threw her down, and quickly tied her hands and feet to the rim of the machine, stretching out her delicate body over the cross formed by the spokes. Then they applied themselves to the ropes at three sides with the energy of vengeful demons and stretched them until her hands and feet were drawn over the hoop.

Nizra had closed her eyes. Only at the last turn of the ropes she had uttered a slight sigh: every joint of her body was wrenched, and her bosom heaved with her labored efforts at taking breath; her chest was almost rent in two with the merciless tension of her bonds. When she was securely fastened to the wheel, the executioners raised it up, and inclining it a little backwards, so as to show her figure to the madly applauding crowds and to the heartless

king, they propped it on a pair of uprights, to which they nailed it fast. No wheel had ever given up its victim after it was raised and fastened; Nizra was on the road of her last triumph.

Her father had been held back from the scene in the custody of the jailers. He had trembled and quivered in every fiber of his body during the short proceedings of her stringing on her death-bed; but when the frantic shouts of applause told him that she had persevered, he became still, and although large, hot tears tumbled down his cheeks, he raised his eyes towards Heaven with a mute appeal to Heaven's kindness upon his dying child.

The crowds closed in on the ghastly spectacle. Gradually the brutal ferocity subsided; the single members of the mad horde bore each a heart in his breast. In a multitude bent upon one common design, the voice of the individual heart is suppressed; but when the insensate spell is broken, and each mind returns to its own sense, it realizes the horror of plotting with fools, and claims its birthright of doing its own discerning and planning. The accustomed admiration of Nizra's beauty and virtue was returning and began to steal into one rueful face after another. A quiet pity and a tearful sympathy, like the serene radiance of the Moon

disentangling herself from the dark robes of the storm, were fast shedding their gleam of kindness upon the dreadful scene. An hour after Nizra had been raised up, when nearly every witness of the execution had passed before her cross, and had noticed her blanched face, her parted lips, her closed eyes, and the awful labor of her breast, there was not a heart left that tingled not with sympathy for the patient sufferer.

The king had watched the change of mood with growing alarm. How fickle these masses were! If this sentiment was allowed to grow, they might even force him to exchange places with his victim! If the people turned against him, he was at their mercy; the priests were divided among themselves, the nobles had not yet formally declared valid his assumption of the royal diadem, and the captains of his armies, Persians, Parthians and Scythians, cared little who paid the hire of their soldiers. His mind was troubled, and his face wore the lines of serious concern.

It would have been folly at this critical hour to condemn Caspar to the same punishment; it was dangerous even to threaten him with any punishment; the sympathy for the daughter manifestly embraced the father. "What shall I do?" the tyrant asked anxiously and in

private of the hierophant who had dashed the sacred cup on the altar.

"Finish her as quickly as possible, and banish the old man from the sight of the people," he replied with forced stolidity.

"Finish her at this perilous moment!" the king rejoined, terror-stricken at the desperate suggestion; "a touch of her hair would arouse these fickle fools to revenge against me!"

"Then take her down!"

"And keep the racked and broken form before the eyes of the people? Nay, nay; it would be giving them a scourge into their hands!"

"She cannot live; thou mayest command thy heralds to cry out thy trick as an act of royal mercy."

The language of the priest was taking color from the general impression of the scene; the king turned away from him, and beckoned to one of his captains: "What seems wise to thee to do with the girl, seeing as thou seest the disaffection of the people?"

The captain was not a man of noble character. The licentiousness of the camp had not only blunted the inherited fine sensibilities of his race, but had fostered the animal propensities of the ignoble flesh. In this respect he knew the king to be his peer. Hence, not reflecting that the unsavory things which formed

his own delight, and might be abetted by the king, would be execrated by the people, who had been hurried and hurled into this inconsiderate attack upon the petted darling of the city by the wanton threats of the usurper, he suggested a plan in accordance with his own wickedness.

“Have her stripped to the waist,” he said, laughing coarsely and running his hands down his sides to re-enforce his meaning; “the curiosity of the crowd will repress their common resentment! Try it, and prove its effect!”

Deva was still considering the sinister suggestion, when he noticed that several small bands which had been on the way to their homes in the farther quarters of the city, were returning, shouting and running about a lean and lanky figure, dressed in a tattered and grimy coat, with a strange leather hat on its unsightly red shock, and mounted on a jaded mule. This little diversion might reset the minds in their accustomed levity.

The traveler did not seem to take unkindly the astonishment of the crowd. As he came near and espied the king in his magnificent array, he ostentatiously doffed his hat and made an awkward bow from the back of his mule. But he would not dismount.

“I am looking for my friend Caspar,” he

opened negotiations; "I have ridden up to this town from Egypt, and, let me assure thee, it is a man's feat to crawl up and down these mountains on the back of a mule that is more affectionate than accommodating. If I have to travel much further, I shall be sawed in twain up to the neck. But I think he is here. This looks like the temple he described to me in the land of the Jews."

Rufus had delivered himself of his curiosity in the language of the Romans. Upon noticing the breathless wonder, he first repeated his inquiry in the dialect of Palestine, then in Egyptian, then in his own native tongue, waxing wroth at their ignorance. "Well," he concluded after another pause, "if ye cannot speak any civilized language, I am sorry for you: Caspar, I said, ye dolts!—Caspar!— One of your Magha, who went to Bethlehem to do honor to God!"

The repetition of the familiar name of the celebrated sage in connection with the name of the town which had been the topic of much speculation since Caspar's return, at last enlightened them on the object of the curious wayfarer.

The king ordered Caspar to be brought forth from an inner court where he had been locked up after the raising of Nizra. Rufus had seen the wheel; this form of punishment he had wit-

nessed several times before, in the towns of Syria; only the hoop, or rim, was new to him. The Romans used the plain gibbet for their executions. "Considerate people, these Parsa," he had mused, "to put a touch of trimming even on their gallows!" The figure stretched on the rack might be a man or a woman, as far as he cared, since the Parsa's business did not concern him; and as far as he could distinguish, since men and women dressed very nearly alike among these "sentimental" people.

But when Caspar was brought face to face with him, and Rufus set an eye on the broken form of his old and venerated friend, he quickly glanced back at the wheel once more, raised an arm in its direction, and gasped: "Nizra?" Then he sprang from his beast, and impetuously threw his arms about Caspar's neck.—Yet, they were men, although tried men, and brave. Their grief was deep, honest, and mutual; but it had come upon them both in the nature of a violent eruption of all their reserved and silent suffering; as a fearful disappointment of their first tender hopes, conceived with all the affection of a renewed heart, but latterly bedewed with the first drop of the blood of sacrifice, when they witnessed the hostility of the world towards the Savior. Or had the appearance of the Magic Star for the one, and the



initiation in the wonderful plans of God for the other, not transfigured the purpose and destiny of life as with a view into the ineffable bliss and glory of Heaven?

Now they had fully realized, at the instant of this sorrowful meeting, what the sacrifice of the Savior might come to mean for Himself, and for those who girded themselves with courage to follow Him. It was the collapse of the last bridge on earth under their feet; henceforward they would look above, not beneath themselves, for the road towards their goal; they would reject the earth, and allow the Hand of God to support them.—

The unsightly, nay, ridiculous appearance of the new arrival, and the intimacy with which Caspar, one of the foremost of their distinguished men, conversed with the unkempt and uncouth stranger, for a short while removed the event of the day from the memory of the people. They gathered about the two interesting men, the one, a father whose heart should have been broken, the other, a common wayfarer from some dark region of the earth, where not even the taste for decent attire had been acquired, and wondered, whether the strange new notions of religion which Nizra had so boldly set forth, and which the king had

so vehemently denounced, were the tie that made Caspar and Rufus brethren.

The disreputable presentation of the stranger's beast which stood by meditatively hanging its head, and whisking its frayed and frowzy tail, injected a little humor into their resentment of Caspar's ill-bestowed affection. The Parsa were a proud people, who held none to be their equals.<sup>1</sup> Caspar's conduct was a fresh proof of treason to paternal faith and custom, and the people were again ready to shout: "To the Wheel—with *him!*" The grimness of their first condemnation had disappeared at the offensive spectacle of Caspar's friendship with a dirty barbarian.

Rufus hurriedly related to Caspar, that he had visited the abode of the Child of Bethlehem in Egypt, where He was sojourning with His Mother on account of the danger threatening His life in Judea. Questioned by Caspar as to the rumor that the king of the Jews was dead, he assured him, that it must refer to Herod. "I have seen the Child since the children of Bethlehem were reported killed," he protested; "prince Marut was on his way to prison when he witnessed the butchery: the

<sup>1</sup> The common fault of all the nations of antiquity—(and of our own time?).

new King lives, and His Mother sends her greeting to thee and to Nizra."

The king and his councilors had heard Nizra's name, and the name of Bethlehem, and had winked at each other with significant glances.

"What are you planning together?" the king interrupted their secret conference over the happiness of which the two friends had seemingly forgotten their perilous position. "Tell Nizra that He lives," Caspar first begged Rufus, and then addressed himself to the king:

"We are planning, O king, to serve the true God, and we are rejoiced that He has appeared on earth; the king who is dead according to report, is the *usurper* Herod; the *true* King lives!"

Caspar had surely not intended to upbraid Deva for his usurpation of the Persian throne; but the king's conscience was so tender, that the very sound of the ugly word "*usurper*," must wound him at that juncture. He flared up like a madman: "How long, O ye people of the Parsa, shall we be molested with the audacious flaunting of new gods and new kings in our faces! Away with them! Who will not live by the law of the land, let him be cast forth into the wilderness, where he may make himself kings and gods after his stupid fancy!

How long will ye tolerate the arrogance of the traitors? Cast them forth—away, away! Out of my sight with the vipers!”

But when the king's hangmen were about to lay hands on Caspar and Rufus, a shout of terror went up from the groups who had gathered at the Wheel. The captain who had given that evil counsel to the king to distract the attention of the people from himself by disgracing the agonizing martyr, had slipped away from the tribunal, and had mounted the platform of the place of execution. He had been fumbling at his creese while unsheathing it, when the people cried out with horror at his supposed intention of murder. Rufus threw the hangmen aside, and ran towards the Wheel, forcing his way through the crowd with his fists, elbows and knees. Now he set his foot on the platform to intercept the assassin of Nizra, when he tripped on his ragged mantle, and fell forward. Before he could rise again, a dozen men had surrounded him, and held him down helpless. “He lives, Nizra; He lives!” he shouted at the top of his voice, and tried in vain to free himself from his numerous aggressors.

At last he succeeded in worming out of their hands, at the moment when the attention of all was fixed on the captain's dirk poised

over Nizra's breast. He sprang on the platform, but stood dumb and stiff at the horrible scene. The captain had not sunk his steel into Nizra's bosom; he had with his free hand clutched Nizra's garment at the throat, and had ripped it open down to the ropes around her waist. The nether garment which was thus exposed, was stained with blood. Before he had touched it, Nizra's features had been illumined by a smile of unspeakable happiness, the effect of Rufus's voice and assurance; but when the rude hand of the man touched her tunic she opened her eyes in fright, and, "Nay, nay," she pleaded earnestly, "spare me this outrage!" And her pale face grew white with dismay. But the captain ripped the garment in twain—a violent blush, and a gasp,—and Nizra was dead.

The flesh of her breast was broken lengthwise and across, the two rents joining at right angles in such a way that the one across the breast, directly under the sinews of the upper arms, passed over the vertical one, extending about a hand's breadth on either side, and forming a cross of the shape of that which had developed in the center of the Star at its final disappearance.

The whole revolting scene was enacted so quickly that Rufus, who had hesitated from

dismay only an instant, came too late to prevent the crying outrage, when he threw himself upon the monster, and hurled him from the platform to the pavement. The sight of the bloody cross on Nizra's breast, which vividly reminded him of the mysterious symbol of the Star, and of the sacred *Thau*, of which they had told him so wonderful a story, had torn him out of his stupor with the fright of an apparition.

"Hound," he cried at the man writhing on the ground, "thy outrage to her modesty has killed her!" Then he turned towards the dead maiden, drew nearer the Wheel, and stood there silently weeping.

From the moment when the by-standers had expressed their horror of the captain's outrage, to the moment when Rufus had thrown him down, the entire large mass of people had held their breath in suspense, save for the one great sigh of compassion which accompanied the death-gasp of Nizra. But now arose a tumult of cries and shouts for the punishment of the dastard, and of the king, with whom they had seen him confer, and whom they considered to have counseled the disgraceful act; and people, princes and priests were instantly mingled in the ensuing general confusion and commotion. Blood began to flow; the more timid fled from

out the maddened masses; the king was thrown down from his lofty seat; the hangmen and the handful of the captain's partisans drew their swords, and every man on the ground brandished his dirk.

"Fools!" Rufus snapped at them; "if ye had given half so much sympathy to the cause of the girl before ye racked her, she would be alive, and active to open your crazy heads to a little wit and wisdom!" But he did not join in the riot; he stood on guard over their sacrifice.

But suddenly the rioters with one accord turned towards the Wheel. Pushing Rufus aside, some young men cut Nizra's bands, and lowered the body from the rack. The women offered their coats and veils to wrap about her, the six maidens, her bridesmaids of a few days before, tenderly lifted the body on their shoulders and bore it away amid universal protestations of sorrow from the multitude, which formed in procession, and conducted the dead "Bride of the King" back to her father's house. "The Flower of the Parsa,"<sup>1</sup> they wailed, as they entered Nizra's beautiful garden of roses. They plucked the sweet flowers and buds, and

<sup>1</sup> The original Parsa, the stock of the upper class, were of the Aryan race; the Elamites, the common Persians of the southern regions, were of Semitic origin.

covered the silent sleeper with them as soon as the bearers deposited her in the marble garden house, the burial place of Caspar's beloved dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

The king was found dead. His body was covered with gashes and stabs, and lay alone; he had not been killed by the people. He had probably attempted to flee into the temple, and had been cut down by members of his own retinue. Nobody seemed to be especially interested in the way he met his fate; he was dead, and the world was none the worse for his exit. The courtiers would provide another king in due season.

Caspar arrived at his house during the night. He had secreted himself in the temple during the confusion, and in the dark had made his escape.

When he went out into the garden whither his servants were leading him, he found Rufus, sitting sad and pensive at the entrance of the magnificent repository.

The two men spent the night at the temporary resting place of the martyred maiden. Several times they entered the silent abode of death to take a look at the beautiful face, composed as in sleep, and overspread with a slight shadow as sweetly melancholy as the drooping



flowers in which it was bedded. Once, upon a suggestion from Rufus, Caspar removed the veil from her breast; he was only then made acquainted with the existence of the peculiar wound.

“How she must have suffered!” he moaned. He could readily conceive that so violent a laceration of the breast could have been caused only by the inhuman racking of her whole frame, and the unnatural tension brought to bear upon her chest, as the feet were drawn down to the bottom, and the arms, to the sides of the wheel, with greater force than her frail body could endure.

“But she has conquered,” Rufus replied with halting and heavy voice; “the Symbol of the Fathers is become her reward;” and he pointed to the *Thau*-shaped wound. “What shall *He* have to suffer,” he continued after some space of consideration, “for the cause of truth! How will they treat the shepherd, if such is their dealing with His lambs!”

The next morning, the brother of Deva and Marut was raised to the throne of Mensor, and, a week later, was confirmed in his new dignity by the envoy of Shapur, the Emperor of the Parthians. But Caspar and Rufus were banished to the ancient city of Parsa in the north. Their presence in the newer capital was a con-

stant reminder to the people of their own senseless cruelty, and to the king, of the folly of his short-lived predecessor, and might again incite the fickle populace to revolt and violence.

Caspar's house and estate were exchanged by the king for the new estate awaiting Caspar's occupation at Parsa, and the bereaved father departed from his ancient home with only a small, but the most precious, heritage of his house, the mortal remains of his brave daughter. They had so far been spared from the corruption of the tomb, and appeared, if possible, even more life-like than before her pure and gentle soul was set free from their bonds, to fly to the gates of that Paradise, from which He was descended, for whose love and faith she had laid down her life. Had He already pressed the visible seal of immortality upon the life of them that believe? "*Who believeth in me, shall live, even if he be already dead.*" What new Wonder had entered the world at His coming? The most powerful tyrant of the world, savage Death, seemed already disarmed and cowed; would Sin also, that hideous specter, whose reign of oppression had made groveling slaves of a royal progeny, relinquish its dark throne, and throw down its iron scepter at the appearance of the Heavenly King?

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SIGN OF THE KING

One afternoon a lone traveler hove in sight on the summit of Mount Olivet, near Jerusalem. It was singular that he should be found alone on a busy highway, and the solitude of his lonely journey lay visibly upon his appearance.

From Jericho, whence he had set out towards noon, he had been groping his way in the dark. All the roads were deserted, and as still as in the dead of night. The sky at midday turned from the threatening somberness of an unusually quiet morning to the dismal darkness of a starless, storm-laden night. When he passed through the hamlet of Bethphage, he was startled at the rocking of the earth under the feet of his nervous dromedary, and at the dull sounds right and left of the road, where the dead were buried on the terraces of the hills. Upon looking more closely, he saw how the stones at the mouths of the tombs were thrown down, and proceeding more rapidly for the fright of his beast, he discovered figures in

grave-clothes moving ahead of him, seemingly through the air, in the oppressive darkness of the unnatural night.

Then the sky cleared almost in an instant, and when he reached the crest of the Olive hills, the holy city of the Jews lay before his sight in the cold and watery gleam of the setting sun. Over towards the northeastern gate of the New City, he beheld scattered stiff and frightened groups of men, standing about a cross—no; a second look revealed two more of the bloody Roman gibbets. “An execution for high treason, as I often saw them in my days of service in the army,” he said to himself, and thoughtfully descended into the valley. But as it made no difference by what gate he entered, he turned his beast towards the mount at his right, where the people were standing about, and which was not far from the Gate of Herod. On the way, his beast once stopped so unexpectedly and abruptly, that he nearly lost his seat; he was standing before a deep, fresh chasm, a rent in the rock, which extended to the top of the hill. He was obliged to turn back in order to cross over.

His heart was in his mouth; the darkness had been, after all, only the mantle of an earthquake. The uncanny apparitions of the dead might have been the creation of his fear; but

the rocking of the earth had been real; here was the proof impressed upon the riven stone.

As he approached the groups, he distinguished Roman soldiers. Their captain, of the rank of a centurion, was mounted, and was just thrusting his spear into the side of the only victim left upon the crosses; the other two had already been taken down.

At the foot of that cross, he noticed a group of women, sad and sorrowful. "His mother, probably," he thought, "and some friends, who were not ashamed to assist at his shameful judgment."

The centurion's honest and open face at once attracted his attention. "I have seen these honest eyes before," he mused, and approached him; "but this young man is no older than I was when I left the legions; and I have certainly not seen a Roman in some thirty years!"

But his own figure, mounted on the beautiful beast from the farther eastern regions, had also drawn the eyes of the idlers upon itself, and the soldiers in particular made a close survey of his person. He was tall and powerful, his long hair was gray, his pose erect, and his movements were full of energy and military precision; he was no ordinary traveler of the class of merchants and pilgrims who frequented the Holy City in the days of the Paschal feasts.

Nor was he a Jew; the Jews were forbidden to travel on feast-days.

He was in doubt about the manner of introducing himself. The Roman officers were sensitive unto haughtiness towards "barbarians"; and barbarian was every one, not a Roman. He would take a chance at reviving the memory of an honored old prefect of the legion, whose name may not yet have gone out of the stories of the barracks. "*Ave, Marce, Præfecte!*"<sup>1</sup> he saluted, as he made his mount go down on its knees to allow him to alight.

"*Eho!*"<sup>2</sup> the centurion exclaimed, a little taken aback at the undeserved honor of being saluted as a prefect;<sup>3</sup> "I am neither Marcus, nor prefect; Marcus, the prefect, was my father."

"That is what I thought," said Rufus with his twinkling eyes, but replied aloud: "And my superior in the *Syriaca*,<sup>4</sup> thirty years ago! May it be well with him among the legions of the Orcus!"<sup>5</sup> But noticing the depression of the soldier, he deferred entering upon a discussion of the past, and added soberly: "These last hours must have been hours of terror for Jeru-

<sup>1</sup> "Hail, Marcus, Prefect!"

<sup>2</sup> "Ho! Haloa!"

<sup>3</sup> *Præfectus*: the Commander of an entire legion (5-6000 men).

<sup>4</sup> "The Syrian—" supply: "Legion."

<sup>5</sup> The Lower Regions.

salem; this rift in the rock is a dreadful witness of the earthquake!"

Longinus simply pointed to the cross, where a few men were lowering the body of the victim. It was a body of remarkable delicacy of build; and the face, although covered with blood, and purple with the cold breath of death at the lips and under the eyes, betrayed a loftiness and majesty, not only rare, but absolutely divine. Rufus remembered only one impression of such serene and sovereign delicacy and dignity: the face of the Child of Bethlehem, and that of His Mother. At Bethlehem he had first conceived the idea that the human mold was fashioned by the hand of God Himself, and inspired with the breath of God.

From the face of the corpse he lifted his eyes to the curious tablet at the head of the cross. It was covered with three lines of scrawled letters, the first line in Hebrew, which he could not read; the second in Greek, which he might have deciphered, had he not seen at the outset that the name was not Greek, but a transliteration of a Hebrew name; but the third was in Latin: "*Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Judæorum.*"<sup>1</sup>

"*Rex Judæorum?*" he read aloud, and repeated, paling to the lips, and looking with

<sup>1</sup> "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

amazement and incredulous perplexity at the agitated centurion. "He was the Son of God!" the Roman confessed, fixing his brimming gaze on Rufus, with as plain an apology for the blood on the head of his spear, as a Roman soldier could force himself to make.

"Nizra!" Rufus exclaimed, his voice ragged and heavy; "He has shown thee the way!"

He would go to the Mother to speak to her a word of sympathy; but her suffering was evidently boundless, and, at the same time, so heroic in its humble resignation, that he dared not approach her, and touch the tender heart with a new reminder of her happiness at Bethlehem, when she embraced Him, an infant fair, even with the same anxious affection that now fastened her arms about the lifeless and disfigured form of her Son. One of the women, however, of those who knelt about the sorrowing Mother, uttering her inconsolable grief in spasmodic sobs, that appeared to arise out of the depths of a broken heart, interested him very much for her unmistakable resemblance to Nizra. "Who is that woman with the blood on her hair?" he inquired of Longinus. "It is the 'Sinner of Magdala,'" he replied, "whom *He* delivered from the temptations of her wealth, a princess among her people; she was kneeling at his feet when my spear pierced



His breast, and His heart's blood spurted down on her head and shoulders. It was His care of the lowly and the outcast that cost Him his life. But, mark me, stranger; the end is not yet of this Man's career! He has promised to raise Himself alive out of the tomb!"

Longinus had given the assurance of his belief in the crucified King of the Jews with such simple earnestness, that Rufus took courage to enquire into the circumstances of His life and death, and having gained the conviction, that Jesus of Nazareth, the "Rex Judæorum," and the Infant, whom he and the Magi had visited at Bethlehem, were without doubt identical, he asked curiously: "Why have they crucified their King?" "Because He proclaimed Himself the Son of the living God," Longinus replied; "they would not have an humble man upbraid them with their wickedness, and withdraw them from the luxury and wealth which Rome has enabled them to enjoy and to increase."

"But why have they written His title over His cross?"

"It was written by the Procurator Pilate against their protest."

"Then the Roman knew well what was right and seemly."

Then he in turn related what he had wit-

nessed of the wonders of the Savior's infancy. But after the bodies were removed, Longinus invited him to take lodgings for a few days at an inn near the Prætorium, where the cohort of Longinus had their temporary quarters.

"How slow is the world to comprehend the Light!" Rufus repeated again and again on the way through the desolate City, whose terror at the awful sacrilege of her King's death was written in the faces of all her children.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE VISION OF THE MOUNTAIN

A few weeks later Rufus was found in Galilee, on the shores of the beautiful lake of Geneser. He had been a witness to the thousand schemes of the Jewish leaders, concocted to discredit the report of the "Nazarene's" glorious resurrection. Longinus had told him of the insane attempt at silencing the soldiers of the guard placed over His tomb, and a wily old Greek from Alexandria, to whom Caspar had introduced him by letter, both for hospitality and for financial assistance, had confided to him that monitory letters had been sent out to all the synagogues of Asia and the Dispersion, discrediting the late happenings, and admonishing the elders to be watchful, lest the blasphemous rumors gain headway. He, the Greek, the confidant of the ex-highpriest Annas, whose foreign business operations he directed, had been privileged to inspect a copy. "The scribes themselves know full well, that they have pitted their whole authority against an incontestible fact; but just for that reason

they are resolved to risk their utmost: the terrible truth must not out!—Have they not killed *the Son of God?*” Such was the speculation of the Greek.

Rufus had likewise heard whisperings of the Risen One’s appearing to His disciples; but before he could find one of the disciples, he was informed that they all had removed to Galilee at their Master’s word. Rufus would not rest until he also had seen the Risen King, in order to make a creditable report to Caspar, who was anxiously awaiting his return.

Caspar and Rufus had together figured out the time, when, according to the prediction of Daniel, the sacrifice and oblation of the Jewish worship was to fail, and had arrived at the conclusion, that the fated day was near. Then Rufus had set out for Palestine. Caspar was a hundred years old, and too feeble to undertake the long journey. He remained at home, in the ever-blooming bower where a new repository had been erected for the entombing of Nizra’s remains, which had not even then taken on the signs of death and decay. They were covered with fresh roses every day, not only by Caspar, but also by their newly found friends among the Parsa, and the admirers of Nizra’s incorruptible beauty.

Two days after his arrival at Capharnaum,

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the desire of Rufus was gratified. Simon, the leader of the little band of disciples, had allowed him to associate himself to them, and to go out with them to a mountain, where the Master had appointed to meet them.”<sup>1</sup>

Arriving at the foot of the mountain, they looked about for the Master; but he was not there. Some began to cast doubting glances at Simon. Should his zeal have betrayed him into a misinterpretation of the Master’s direction? Why should He wish to separate them from the rest of the people, and to call them aside in the wilderness? He had appeared to them in Jerusalem, at Emmaus, on the lake shore, in the midst of the throbbing life of the community. His visits had always been attended with some fright and terror: He had come back from death, and His manner of address had become so solemn despite its old-time kindness and affection! They stood together like sheep in the rain, afraid and irresolute, yet burning with the desire to meet Him, from whom they could not detach their love and veneration.

At last Thomas took heart, and upbraided Simon. “Hast made a mistake?” he questioned pointedly; “we are footsore and hungry from wandering, and could as well have ex-

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xxviii. 16.

pected the Master at the Lake. It is to no purpose that we have journeyed into this wild solitude; the Master is not here!"

"Let us go up higher," Simon suggested, without taking notice of Thomas's irritation.

"I am afraid enough here," Thomas opposed; "I will not go up into the thick brush and bramble, where one cannot see the other!" The rest seemed willing to support the opposition of the doubter; but when Simon moved ahead, they all followed him, ascending the rough and steep mountain-side. "Stay here," Thomas directed Rufus, "until we return; perhaps the Master has not manifested Himself because thou art with us;" and Rufus remained behind. "Possible," Rufus said, disappointed and sad; "I do not know, why I should deserve to see Him, except because I love Him as well as this stickler; the Master is surely nobler than His hard-headed, intractable, and irresolute disciples! If His Mother were here, I should surely be permitted to see Him; why, I saw Him in His weakness; I saw Him in His death: *Me—!* I am not afraid to look at Him in His glory!"

Still, his protesting did not avail him to obtain the coveted privilege; he sat down on a stone, and followed the disciples with his eyes as far as they were visible. For a few

minutes he lost sight of them; but then they reappeared on a terrace, or, on what must be a terrace, or a ledge, to offer them sufficient room to stand together, although from below it appeared to be only a yellowish blotch.

Suddenly he saw the Master, standing above them on the side of the mountain, and extending His hands over them in benediction. They fell on their knees and adored Him. "Oh, Thomas," Rufus exclaimed, beside himself with happiness, "I see Him!" And he also bent his knees, and raised his folded hands towards the Master, who appeared now to speak to them, and to give them directions; He gesticulated gently, and once spread out His arms, as if He were inviting the whole earth to flee into them, and to submit to His loving embrace.

About this magnificent display of love, Rufus addressed Thomas, as soon as the disciples returned. "Oh," Thomas blustered, blushing amid tears of mingled regret and happiness, "He bid us go forth into the whole world, and teaching, baptize all nations; and He assured us that He will remain with His ministers and with His work even to the consummation of the world!—Hast *also* seen Him?"

"Ay, Thomas; but not through any kindness of thine! He Himself is not as jealous of His favors as thou."

Rufus had indeed noticed the change of Thomas's mood for the better; but the curt refusal had so piqued him, that he made no effort to suppress the ring of satisfaction in his retort.—

How small men may become, when they forget the generous scope of charity, and make their sensitive selves the sole object of their concern!

In the evening of the same day, Rufus departed on his homeward journey, eager to bear to Caspar the glorious message of the new King of the world, that He Himself would reign and rule over His new spiritual Kingdom.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FLOWER OF THE PARSA

During the absence of Rufus, Balthassar, the sage from Babylon, had sought his old friend Caspar. He had also had a premonition of the "fulness of time." Therefore, as he had made his first journey into the land of the Jews to the *cradle* of the newborn heavenly King at the side of Caspar, he had resolved to make his second visit, to His *throne*, also in the company of his pious and learned friend. But when he found that Caspar was unequal to the difficulties and hazards of the undertaking, and that Rufus had been dispatched to watch the events of the times, he consented to make his abode at Parsa until the return of Caspar's scout.

The story of Nizra's sacrifice affected him more with joy than with pity or wonder; but the preservation of her comeliness in death, the absence of every sign of corruption, and even of failing and fading grace and beauty in her appearance, filled him with admiration. Day after day, he and Caspar visited the mar-

ble tomb, where her body still lay in a bed of flowers, which loving hands renewed every day, as fresh and untainted as it had lain on the cruel bed of torture on the day of her sacrifice. And when Balthassar discovered the cross-shaped wound on her breast, still fresh, and plainly distinguishable through the byssus veil which was spread over it, he was ravished into ecstasy, and proclaimed aloud, that it was the 'Sign of the King.'

But one day, about three months after Rufus had departed, they noticed that the veil over Nizra's breast and face was slightly raised over the region of the heart. It was on the sixth day of the week, according to their own ancient calendar, and according to the reckoning of the Jews.<sup>1</sup> They removed the delicate cloth, and found a rosebud raising its blushing little head over the seam of the wound. On the third day after the discovery, the tiny bud had developed and opened into a beautiful white rose. It continued to bloom for forty days, while the freshness of Nizra's face began to fail; and when, on the fortieth day, the petals of the flower dropped and faded fast, the wound had completely closed, leaving only a thread-like,

<sup>1</sup> On Good Friday. The old calendar of the Persians, which assigned Saturday as the day of rest and religion, was changed about 500 years before Christ.

cross-shaped scar, and death, after so long a pause, resumed its interrupted work of destruction; but not with its accustomed neglect of decency and respect. It reduced the size of the corpse to the size of the frame; it despoiled the brow of its translucent whiteness, and the cheeks of their blush and bloom; but it did not touch the flesh with the finger of dissolution.

Such was the condition of Nizra's body when Rufus returned, and went out to the *dakhma*<sup>1</sup> to view it. They had related to him, that about two months before, on the sixth day of the week, the transformation had set in. "That was the day on which the Savior died," he exclaimed; "and on the third day He rose out of the grave! About the fortieth day, I know nothing."

Rufus thereafter often repeated or supplemented his report of the novel things he had seen and heard of the Christ in Jerusalem and in Galilee. "He is the *Christ* of God," he explained, when they looked at him inquiringly at the first mention of the new and significant name; "even the soldiers, who crucified Him, confessed that He is the Son of God."

<sup>1</sup> An open burial-place, where the corpse is exposed to the air and the vultures; in use to the present day with the Parsees.

Now the prediction made at the birth of Nizra became clearer: The Cross was *His* sign; He was the Immortal King, who drew unto Himself the children of a lost and erring race as His brethren and sisters; He was the Prince of Peace, of a peace to be won through the discipleship of Truth, amid trials and sacrifices, perhaps, but with infallible results. Thus could Nizra, and thus could anyone who had the courage to profess the Truth in word and deed, become brother and "sister to the King, and bride to the Prince"; and 'the Symbol of the Fathers,' the sign of the Cross, the sign of election, the sign of the warriors against the deceit of sin and error, would be made their reward in as much as it was the seal of His followers, and the title of His brotherhood.

But their speculations as to the nature of His reward ever went to pieces on an insurmountable obstacle: He was risen; He has instructed His messengers to go forth to preach and to baptize; the patience which He Himself exhibited, and which they imitated, rendered them secure from trepidation at the dangers and hardships of daily life: but who could lift the veil from the dark *Hereafter*!

Life must continue beyond the narrow space of mortality, lest the very means of liberation from the dread of daily ills become vain! Why

strive after peace here below, when there may be no peace beyond? Why not, then, rather strive to obtain peace by the sword, than by the cross?

These misgivings were not the result of doubt, but of their perplexity; not of uncertainty, but of their ignorance and inexperience in things divine. The proofs of His sublime mission were at hand in such abundance, that they doubted not His origin; if Rufus had only asked Thomas, what mystery might be contained in the *Baptism*, which the Master had ordered and commissioned them to confer at their teaching! They understood the import of the word; it signified an immersion, probably an ablution; but did it signify a purification, an elevation; was it the Gate to the Paradise of God? It was the *Entrance of Heaven* that they were groping!

The change in Nizra's tomb had also been witnessed by her habitual visitors from Parsa, and had given rise to various contradictory speculations. Some attributed it to the appearance of the mysterious rose, which, they said, had grown out of her heart, and had consumed the secret remnant of her life in its own life and growth. Others said: Nay; the rose was the reincarnation <sup>1</sup> of Nizra's soul, which, after

<sup>1</sup> A Brahmanistic error, foisted on the people, and foreign to the old beliefs of the Persians.

it had passed through the form of the beautiful emblem of purity, was set free forever, and reunited with Brahma in eternal peace. For, the devotees of Brahma believed in the migration of souls, as those of Buddha dreaded it as the cause of unending misery.

But at last the curious speculators detected the branch, which had found its way from a rosebush at the side of her sarcophagus through a crack in the cemented joints, had pierced her shroud under the left arm, and had reappeared in the rent of her breast. This discovery disposed of the theory of reincarnation and metempsychosis and exposed its advocates to the derision of the more considerate.

Others again argued that the fading of the form of Nizra was due to the failure of the mission of the new God whom she adored. They had picked up bits of the story which Rufus brought from the land of the Jews; they had heard, and believed that the Son of God was crucified by the people whom He was come to save. But they had also heard that He was risen,—and doubted. He had lived and reigned a short space, and had ultimately surrendered to the persecutions of the ancient hierarchy, and thereby forfeited His title to immortality among the gods, and had lost the power to protect His adherents: His work was destroyed

by the jealousy of the older tenants of heaven.

But all the doubters and inquirers were unanimous in their admiration of the constancy of the three men who were most intimately affected by the uncommon lot of Nizra. The lanky stranger, above the other two, was ever ready loudly to profess his belief in the victory of the 'King of the Jews' despite His early consummation, and his hope for a complete unveiling of the mysterious new doctrine which promised delivery from the bondage of sin and sensuality. "He has commanded His disciples," he was wont to argue, "to preach the gospel<sup>1</sup> to all the nations of the earth, and to baptize them in the name of the Triune God. Therefore, let us wait and see what tidings will come to us, and what effect His Baptism will work in us. It is idle to speculate on the facts alone; we must also take His teaching into account, of which we know too little to enlighten us on the mystery of His mission.

When, therefore, one day, a strange teacher appeared in the market place of Parsa, and announced the necessity of "Baptism for the forgiveness of sin," the multitude, made keen and eager by the exhortations of Rufus, thronged about him with large-eyed and open-mouthed curiosity. Rufus heard of the universal com-

<sup>1</sup> Good-spell, God-spell: "Glad Tidings."

motion aroused by the teaching of the stranger, and also went to hear him. But he at once recognized in him Thomas, the 'stickler,' who must have outgrown his narrow-minded selfishness; for he was all fire, all gentleness, all kindness, all zeal for the salvation of the Parsa, whom he addressed as brethren, and whom he generously assured of a portion in God's own heavenly Kingdom. He urged them to be baptized in the name of Jesus, the Crucified; by baptism, the ineffable communion with the Savior, the Son of God, would be established in their souls, and His own work of the Redemption would be applied to them!

In this vein the stranger taught them on three successive days. On the morning of the fourth day, several hundred of his hearers petitioned him for the blessing of baptism, and for the power of the Holy Ghost, of which he had told them incredible wonders. But when they were baptized, and he had imposed hands on them, and they began of their own accord to exhort their doubting brethren with words evidently inspired from above, nearly all the inhabitants prostrated themselves at the feet of Thomas, and begged to be made partakers of the holy gifts of the Savior.<sup>1</sup>

Caspar and Balthassar, together with Rufus,

<sup>1</sup> See the Life of St. Thomas.



had been the first to be initiated in the brotherhood of the Son of God.

After the labors of the apostle were completed, he retired from the market place, and withdrew to Caspar's house. But the enthusiasm of his newly acquired flock was so great, that they would not allow him to go out of their sight. They had thrown the statue of Mithra out of the temple, and had erected a cross in its place; and now they begged Thomas to offer the holocaust of the New Law on their ancient altar, and to "besprinkle them with the Blood of the Lamb of God," according as he had promised in his sermon.

The next day, he preached to them in the temple. It was a day of intense and joyful expectation. The minister of the Son of God introduced them by easy stages into the holiest of the mysteries of the Living Redeemer, the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sacrament. In the stillness of midnight, amid thousands of hearts throbbing with the delight of their new love, he enacted the sacred rite, and raised in his hands the Bread of Angels before their eyes. And when the simple words, "Behold the Lamb of God," rang out from his lips over the silent worshipers, every head was bowed, and every heart was kindled with the bliss of their humble adoration.

"Oh, if Nizra had lived to see this day," Rufus said the next day, when they were protesting their happiness to the apostle.

"Who is Nizra?" Thomas inquired of Rufus.

"The daughter of Caspar; she was killed more than thirty years ago, because she confessed the divinity of the Holy Child of Bethlehem. She was in our company, when we visited Him. Her own people broke her on the Wheel."

Some of the by-standers who had been among the doubters at the time of Nizra's transformation, were curious what explanation the apostle could give of the singular event, and related it to him, insisting especially on the disastrous fortieth day. "On the fortieth day after His resurrection," Thomas answered them, "the Lord rose up into heaven, leading away with Himself the captives of death. Her soul was undoubtedly among His captives. Her body had been preserved intact from corruption in testimony of her hope of Redemption."

"Thou hast said that the Savior has power over the dead also," one of the men tempted him in the boldness of his new faith; "has He not given this power to his ministers?"

"It is not essential to our office," Thomas enlightened him, not at all pleased with his idle inquisitiveness; "we are not sent to min-

ister to this life, but to life eternal. Yet Peter has recalled to life Tabitha, dead at Joppa,<sup>1</sup> in order to strengthen the faith of the brethren. But ye are steadfast in your faith without signs from heaven!"

"He cannot do it," one of the obstinate old priests sneered; "and the rest of his boasted mysterious powers are as vain as the boast of Peter! Ye are fools, to be led astray by this glaring confusion," he shouted over the heads of the offended believers.

Thomas arose. "Where have you laid her?" he asked simply.

They led him out into the garden. At the foot of the sarcophagus of Nizra, Thomas knelt down, and prayed aloud, extending his arms towards heaven; "Forsake not Thy flock, O Lord Jesus, and manifest the power of Thy Name to Thy children who trust in Thee!"

He approached the side of the stone bed, and bade Rufus remove the cloths from the face of the corpse. Caspar almost fainted from agitation, and the people who had gained admittance to the repository were pale with excitement and terror.—Would he recall one from eternity?

But Thomas quietly took the withered hand of Nizra. "In the name of the Lord Jesus of

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 36-41.

Nazareth Crucified, arise!" he said calmly, and Nizra arose, as beautiful as in the days of her bridal honors, and as fresh, and as full of life, as in the days of her childhood.

The first to salute her, was Rufus. "Nizra! Nizra!" he shouted at the maiden as she was standing in the stone casket, smiling serenely on the dismayed witnesses of her resurrection; "Hail, all hail! I can read Heaven in thy face!"

After a short pause of suspense, the multitude caught the blissful sentiment of Rufus, and most heartily joined in his salutation: "Hail, hail to the Flower of the Parsa!"

THE END



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